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Designs In Traditional Arts of Bengal

DIRECTORATE OF INDUSTRIES
GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

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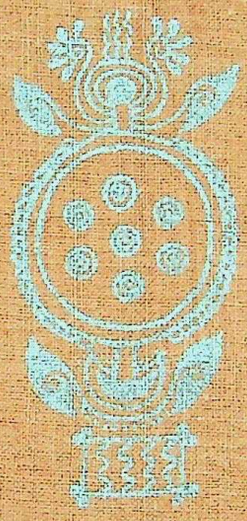
DESIGNS IN TRADITIONAL ARTS OF BENGAL



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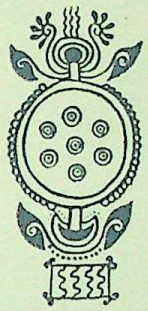

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DESIGNS
IN
TRADITIONAL ARTS
OF
BENGAL

FOREWORD BY

SRIMATI PADMAJA NAIDU

Governor of West Bengal

INTRODUCTION AND TEXT BY

KALYANKUMAR GANGULI M.A. D.PHIL

PREMCHAND ROYCHAND SCHOLAR

DIRECTORATE OF INDUSTRIES

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

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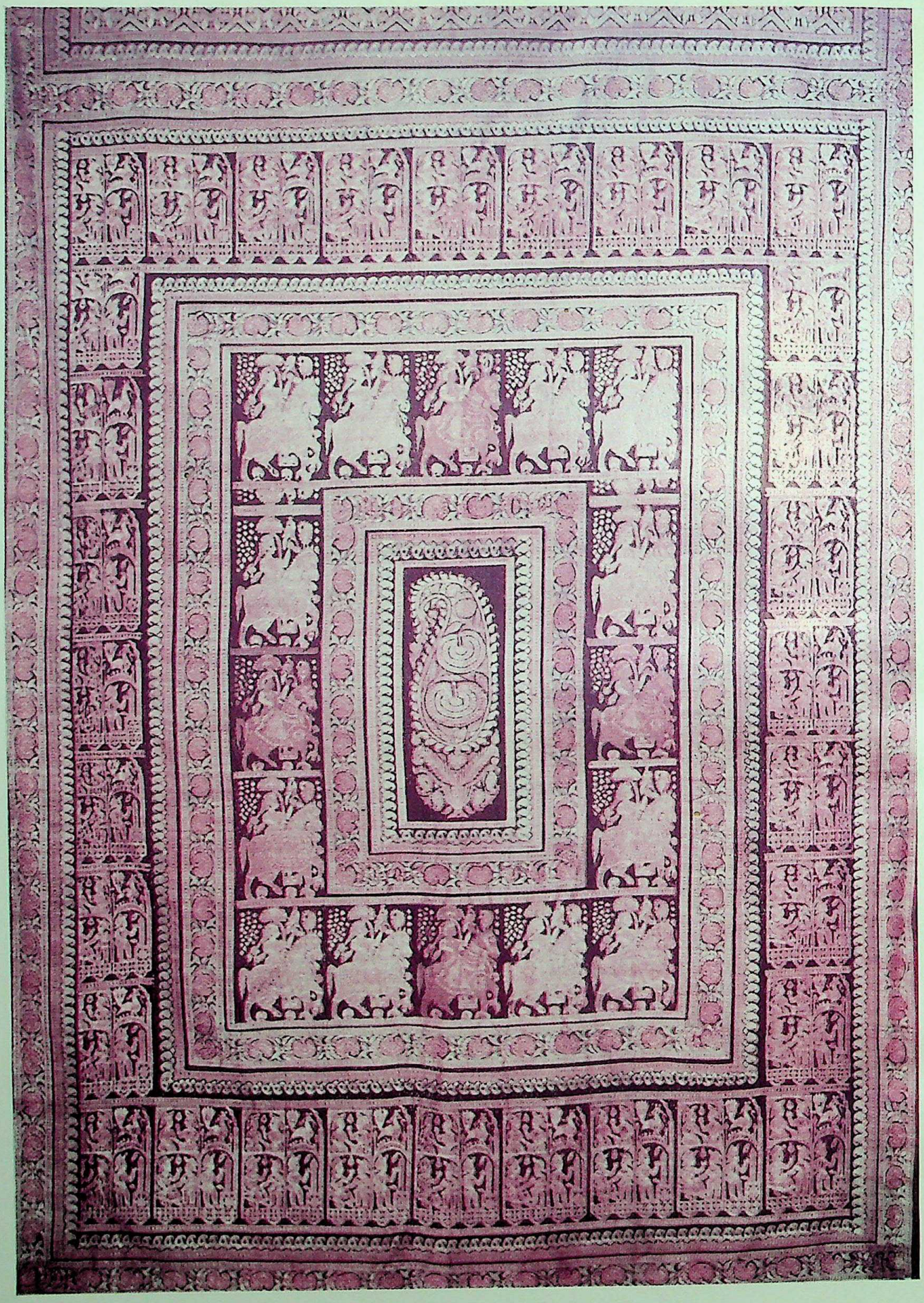

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FOREWORD

PERHAPS nothing that has come in the wake of the achievement of Independence in India is so significant as the widespread resurgence of interest in everything that is deeprooted in the lives of our peasants. This increasing awareness of the priceless treasures hidden in our ancient folk lore, folk song, folk dance, folk art and folk craft is symbolic of the growing sense of nationhood in a free people. It has been revealed gradually to a generation that had inherited the debased taste of several decades of close contact with the cheap, machinemade products of other countries what a wealth of vital beauty there is in the arts and crafts of our own country.

In a country like India whose people even today are almost entirely dependent on agriculture, the history of cottage industries has, from time immemorial, been inextricably intertwined with our ageold struggle for existence against the ruthlessness of Nature. This is especially true of Bengal whose peasants have for centuries waged unceasing war against the ravages of alternate floods and droughts, both resulting in famine. For in spite of its elaborate network of rivers there are vast tracts in Bengal where, in the past, a few inches more or a few inches less of rainfall in any year used to make all the difference between life and death. But in the face of drought and flood and famine, of disease and sudden disaster, of human oppression and human neglect, our craftsmen have never lost faith in themselves and their destiny. Year after year, generation after generation, century after century they have with indomitable courage continued to concentrate their skill on transforming whatever raw materials were available in their villages into beautiful things of utility.

In the ultimate analysis the creative urge that has found expression in a myriad forms of loveliness throughout the length and breadth of India has flowered out of the long drawn out human agony of centuries upon centuries of hunger and want and insecurity.

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This is the explanation of the almost unbroken continuity of design and form and colour that has survived through the ages in spite of neglect and lack of encouragement. The inherent vitality of Indian arts and crafts is due to the fact that they are of the very stuff and texture of the life of the Indian peasant. In this context the relation of the craftsman to his natural environment and the historical background of his heritage is a factor of paramount importance in the proper preservation of all handicrafts in India. To remove the craftsman from his ancestral home and transplant him in the city as is, alas, too often done today in the misplaced zeal to commercialise his products, is to rob him of his native talent and destroy the spontaneity of his work. It also defeats the very purpose for which a place of honour is given to cottage industries in National Planning—to protect the peasant in times of stress by providing him with an additional source of income.

No other part of India, with perhaps the exception of Kashmir and the Deccan, possesses so large a variety of ancient arts and crafts as Bengal. Each district and almost every medium utilised has its own unique design. It is imperative that these designs should be preserved carefully so that they may be a source of inspiration to successive generations of artists and craftsmen and designers who could interpret and reinterpret them in accordance with the changing needs of their times.

The Book of Designs in Traditional Arts of Bengal, to which I am writing this Foreword, is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the many ancient arts and crafts of Bengal that we are in some danger of forgetting. It has analysed, with a wealth of detail based on deep study, the history of these arts and crafts and has illustrated them with fine reproductions of rare textiles, sculpture, metalware and paintings from museums and private collections. As in most other parts of India, the major cottage industry of Bengal, second in importance only to agriculture, is handloom weaving. The handloom textiles of Bengal—the fabulous Jamdani and Kashida Muslins of Dacca, the gorgeous Baluchar silks of Murshidabad and the intricately handsewn Kanthas of East Bengal—have been famous for centuries. No less famous were the exquisite ivory carvings of Murshidabad, the terracottas of Jessore, the images made

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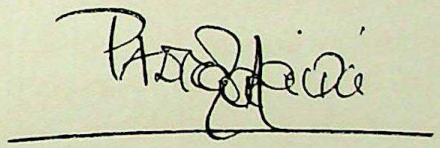
in Krishnagar, the elaborate techniques of metalware, the scroll paintings of the Patuas and numerous other crafts.

If I have mentioned only a few of the myriad beautiful arts and crafts of Bengal it is because I find it a little difficult to assess their relative artistic values measuring one against the other. To me personally all handicrafts possess a certain degree of beauty in assessing which it is not sufficient merely to look for happy combinations of technique and colour and design. The human element may never be forgotten and these products must be judged in relation to the harmonious coordination of the creative brain and expert eye and skilled hand of the individual craftsman. For it is only the human spirit that invests the work of man with any abiding beauty and the story of the arts and crafts of India is the long, long saga of human endurance that, transcending human suffering, has expressed itself in forms of beauty.

March 10, 1963



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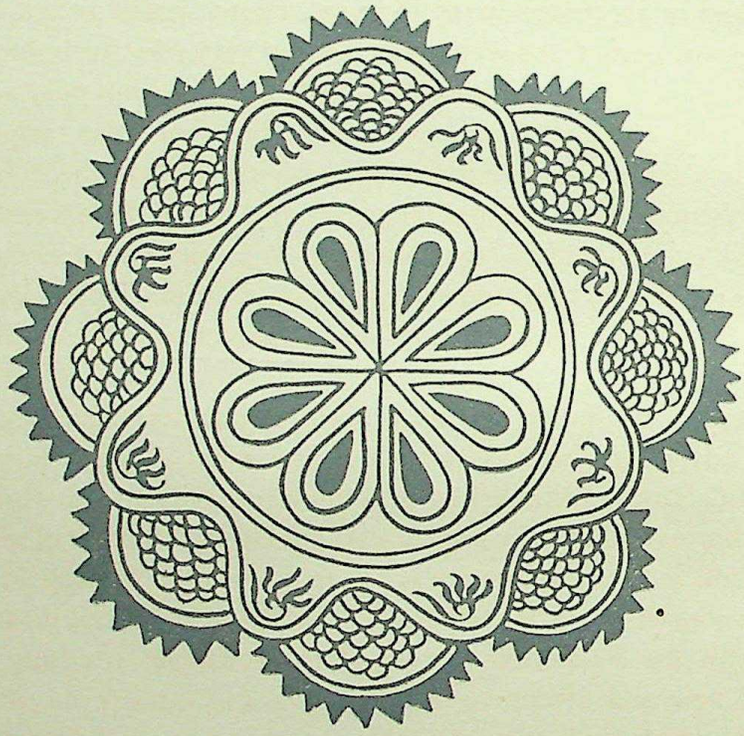

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PREFACE

In presenting a book of designs the Directorate of Industries, Government of West Bengal, has ventured to explore the vast range of traditional arts which may be profitably exploited by artists, craftsmen and designers in this country while the book may be read with pleasure by the layman as well. The industrial arts of India exist from very early times in a variety of materials and in an endless array of forms, shapes, patterns and colours. These wares have earned reputation for having very effectively combined utility with elegance. The craftsmen who made these had not only acquired considerable skill through long experience but had also acquired a thorough understanding of the underlying unity which should exist between the material, the purpose of use and the persons for whom those were meant. This skill and understanding have contributed to the high excellence of the industrial wares of India and the happy equilibrium which has been established between the sensibilities of the consumer and the significance of the wares produced.

The industrial revolution has not proved to be an unmixed blessing for men and its advent in India is causing fundamental changes in peoples' approach to life. In the field of art-wares the forms and patterns which have endured for long are falling easy prey to the capricious onslaught of machine. Even handicrafts in their decline are not spared. In countries well advanced in industry is noticed a growing tendency of bringing industrial products in conformity with the susceptible nature of the consumer resulting in the emergence of new and attractive designs of various kinds even in highly mechanised forms of production. In achieving this eyes are being directed to the stores of traditional designs for inspiration.

India, however, has been very rich in tradition of her artistic designs and these can yet provide considerable strength and inspiration to producers and designers of the emerging generation. There are already in the field a few publications dealing with the artistic traditions of the country, but there is a pressing necessity of a cogent and systematic account of this wealth for industrial use. With this end in view the Directorate planned to publish this book and is now happy in presenting it to the public. The book contains a survey of designs found in Bengal and has based its account on various objects such as sculptures, paintings, terracottas, dolls, toys, textiles, mats, utensils and the like. The work was planned by a Board of Editors

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consisting of experts, both official and non-official. The task of writing the text was entrusted to Dr. Kalyan Kumar Ganguli, on common consent, and he kindly agreed to take up this responsibility. I am grateful to him for his ungrudging co-operation.

I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to the authorities of the Art Section of the Indian Museum, the Asutosh Museum, the Government Industrial & Commercial Museum, the Gurusaday Museum, the Indian Institute of Art in Industry, and also to Sri Gopen Roy for allowing us to use photographs of exhibits in their respective collections. Without their co-operation the book would not have seen the light.

It is too difficult for me to adequately express the gratitude of the Directorate of Industries to Srimati Padmaja Naidu, Governor of West Bengal, for the encouragement and inspiration received from her in preparing this book. I am extremely grateful to her for kindly consenting to write the foreword. This amply indicates the importance she attaches to the development of handicrafts industry of this State.

All my colleagues in this Directorate and outside took up this work with personal zeal and devotion. But for the combined effort of all associated with this work we could not have completed it in time. I personally thank them all for the wonderful co-operation they have given to me. We are also thankful to the All-India Handicrafts Board for the assistance received.

Directorate of Industries,
Government of West Bengal
New Secretariat Buildings,
9th floor, Calcutta-1
28.2.63

N. K. Biswas
Addl. Director of Industries
West Bengal

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD	:	By Sm Padmaja Naidu	i
PREFACE	:	By Sri N. K. Biswas	v
CHAPTER ONE	:	Introduction	1
CHAPTER TWO	:	Textiles	8
CHAPTER THREE	:	Dolls, Toys and Terracottas	15
CHAPTER FOUR	:	Ritual Objects, Utensils etc.	22
CHAPTER FIVE	:	Sculpture	31
CHAPTER SIX	:	Painting	37

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CHAPTER ONE

These are days when old traditions are fast losing their appeal, because they are unable to put up any longer with new and changing ideals of the time. But there is no denying that much sustenance and beauty were inherent in those traditions that had evolved through ages and through the efforts and experiences of many. The traditions when alive guide the life and activities of a people but only the artistic creations of man remain as abiding witness of culture. Human genius everywhere has tried to gain fulfilment through creative activities of various kinds. Magnificent monuments of lasting value have been put up by men all over the world but they have not ignored things made for day-to-day use as well. A monumental temple, a great painting or a noble piece of sculpture can contribute largely to æsthetic and spiritual fulfilment but common objects of daily use can also be no less important as matters of abiding pleasure and satisfaction. From a very early stage of development man has been aware of this fact and he has produced objects for common use bearing significant forms and pleasurable shapes. Take for instance the case of simple pottery used for storage or as utensil. From the kneading of clay to the realisation of the final shape of the objects produced by him, the potter remains deeply absorbed in the task he is going to accomplish. Though the particular purpose for which the pot is meant, to a great extent, determines its shape, yet its basic character is found to add significance to its value.

Scholars are of opinion that there had been no æsthetic impulse behind the earliest human attempt at painting or the creation of other various forms. It did not, however, escape the attention of man that every object existing in nature had a particular form and a distinctive colour of its own. This distinctiveness in form and colour has been responsible in creating a diversity in nature that has given great pleasure to the observer. Men were not only pleased at enjoying this diversity but also had themselves tried to emulate nature by creating forms of different kinds.

A feeling of want had impelled man to create new objects necessary for his own use. In creating such new objects he was at the outset inspired either to borrow from nature or to adjust natural forms to his own requirement. Such artistic creations of man have guided him along the way to civilisation. It may well be said that the creative impulse in him

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has engendered civilisation and designs in the new objects created by him have engendered progress. Human progress has thus been associated with new forms, emergence of new ideas and evolution of new tools. All these have helped in the creation of new designs embodying the fruits of intense thinking, deep contemplation and significant ways of expression. While art has given warmth to life and has satisfied man's hunger for better living, design has provided art with significance, giving it shape and making it an instrument of communication. For long in the past there was no art that could be separated from the day-to-day use of man. Art objects were not meant merely to be stored in museums and art collections of impersonal nature. All art objects were objects of necessity and use, and were made to bear some significant forms endowed with a characteristic appeal. The artificers who produced the objects were themselves the users who could understand and enjoy the significance of the objects without any difficulty. Divested of this inner appeal, the objects of art could have little value of their own excepting a mere visual character of shape and colour. Such objects could rise high in the esteem of the user only when the user could prefectly understand what meaning the form of the object conveyed and what particular significance the colour was imbued with. But the producer could not remain the only user of his product for long. Soon he had to share his product with others in exchange of kind or of cash. Those who took finished products from others learnt also the significance of the forms and how to enjoy the pleasure imbued in them. Due to growing social complexities and economic reasons, distinctive groups of people came to be the sole producers of particular items of use. Such groups specialised in particular crafts and acquired remarkable skill in their respective fields of specialisation. Thus the artificer became a craftsman and his skill in the field of work made him an artist.

The first producer of an object could not rest unless a standard was reached and full satisfaction was derived from the shape and character of the object produced. Once a level was attained traditional art became form-bound and repetitive but never lost its appeal and charm. Further, the skill on the part of the hereditary artisans saved those objects from degenerating into just drab replicas of earlier prototypes. Judged on individual level, each such object could well be considered as creations of very high artistic merit.

Specimens of traditional art can be traced in India from a very early age. From proto-historic sites of Indus valley, Gujerat, and Rajputana have been found human and animal figures, potteries, ornaments of personal use and sundry other objects speaking of considered effort and skill

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on the part of the craftsman and sympathy and understanding on the part of those people who had used the objects in their day-to-day life.

In Bengal, however, nothing much had been known about the traditions of remoter age. During comparatively recent times, textiles produced in Bengal had acquired a great reputation. In the Mughal court, there had been considerable appreciation for the Daccai Muslin. The colonial Britishers during the days of John company encouraged the toy makers of Krishnagar. When sophisticated Bengalis, for æsthetic satisfaction, looked to artefacts of European origin, Dineschandra Sen and Gurusaday Dutt, one a teacher and the other a civilian, drew public attention to the immensely rich and variegated treasure of the traditional culture of the country, full of significant art forms of its own. The work so distinctively started by the illustrious pioneers was taken up by the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta University, which now possesses by far the largest and the most varied collection of the traditional arts of Bengal. Study and research carried out during the last forty years in various branches of the folk arts of Bengal have proved, beyond all doubts, a continuity of a tradition that may go back, as the finds from Tamluk, Harinarayanpur near Diamond Harbour, and Chandraketugarh, 23 miles to the north east of Calcutta prove, to a very remote age, centuries, probably millenniums before the Christian era.

The causes of disappearance of the earlier remains of culture in Bengal were many. The land here had been formed of the silts brought down by the two great rivers of India, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The courses of these two main rivers and their many branches and tributaries have furrowed the land making the banks of the rivers unstable and shifting, while high floods and scarcity of stone as building material probably prevented the growth here of any stable and ambitious centres of culture like the great cities built elsewhere in the past. Nevertheless, cities had developed here as the ruins of Harinarayanpur and Chandraketugarh would prove, and culture which had flourished at such remote age did not go into oblivion. The traditions of this culture had been diffused throughout the entire habitational areas of Bengal and had thus preserved for posterity the liveliness and spirit of a very rich heritage.

The most frequent of the finds from the ancient sites of Bengal have been the wide varieties of terracottas and fragments of potteries of different shapes. It appears that clay here has been particularly suitable for baking and the scarcity of stone had been amply compensated by the use of clay. The terracottas dispaly a wide range of subjects and variety of moods. There are human figures sometimes riding on animals like the elephant,

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bull, ram or horse probably indicating divinities of Vedic or local pantheon, or stray standing ones commonly denominated as *Yakshas* or more frequently the *Yakshinis* establishing familiarity of the Bengal artificers with their compatriots in north Indian towns such as Pataliputra, Vaisali, Sravasti and Varanasi. Bricks were being used for structural purposes and temples had come to be built early as the recently discovered temple at Chandraketugarh would prove. At Paharpur near Rajshahi a Buddhist temple built during the *Pala* age stands as a landmark in structural experiment while the walls of this temple retain some of the finest terracotta and stone sculptures marking the early phase of maturity attained in the sculptural art in Bengal. The tradition survived in the numerous brick temples built in different parts of Bengal till as late as the 18th century leaving for the posterity an unparalleled treasure in ornamentation, structural form and designing. The endless lyric of the wall embellishments to be met with upon these temples can hardly be surpassed in design of a rich and abounding variety.

While the temples were mostly fabricated in bricks the divine figures began to emerge in stone, particularly in black basalt from about the ninth century A.D. The rich texture of the black stone quarried from the Rajmahal hills offered enormous possibilities not only in the realisation of forms in rigid and hieratic discipline but also of ornamental forms in the stela where imagination gained a boundless scope for orientation. This new art had sustained for about four hundred years but was completely lost with the advent of the Muslims. Though the tradition has not survived, it has left no mean a heritage from where endless sort of ideas can be resuscitated and fruitfully used in new perspective.

The tradition of image making can be traced in several materials other than stone. Wood had come to be used long before stone, while the other widely used material was clay. Early Indian literature dealing with the art of making images gives a considerable preference to wood as a material suitable for purposes of image making. Among wood again certain specific varieties such as *neem* were considered auspicious for the purpose. Some early specimens of wooden images in Bengal are found in the collections of the Museum at Dacca. The Asutosh Museum has an excellent life size image of about the 17th century A.D. showing the youthful god *Krishna* playing on his flute. Beautiful structures built in the form of *Rathas*, decorative panels in thatched houses, beds or *Simhasanas* made for deities had kept the art of the wood carver alive in Bengal for a long time.

The ancient craft of metal-casting reached a high watermark in pre-Muslim days and was active throughout the years in creating forms

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and shapes of a numerous variety. Not only the large temples used to have images and utensils made of metal; metal objects had their widespread use in individual households as well. Each of such houses was to have a private shrine installing in many cases metal figures of the popular divinities like *Gopala*, *Lakshmi* and the like.

From the field of three dimensional form, the journey to the realm of fabrics, though distant, is a pleasant one. It is now known that the Harappans used cotton fabrics of a very thin texture. Such Harappan fabrics as well as bandages made of fine muslin that wrapped the Egyptian mummies may have been manufactured in Bengal and taken to those places by way of trade. Use of silk, possibly introduced from China, can also be traced in Bengal from a very early age. Many imageries used in the Vedic hymns evidence the charm of the warp and the woof that had been so engrossing to the Vedic composers. Besides cotton and silk India has used from early days wool and many other materials for weaving textiles of many varieties. Apart from improving gradually the texture of the woven fabric, the Indian technician has been able to accomplish high grade of excellence in producing varieties of colour and design in the body of these textiles making those objects of enduring charm and great attractiveness. There is little doubt that the fame earned by Bengal for textiles of unsurpassable quality during the mediæval age had come down from even earlier periods. Some sculptures have representation of garments with designs that were either woven into or printed upon textiles made of cotton. Paintings of this period also have representation of garments with beautiful floral or striped designs on coloured textile of various hues. Bengali literature of later age had knowledge of textile, made of cotton, silk and fibres of many varieties often decorated with warm colour and lively designs of many kinds. Textiles with fine texture, colour and designs have indeed been objects of pride and pleasure of Bengal.

With textiles mention should be made of the tradition of painting, also handed down from a very early age. Painting had an extensive patronage and had become the occupation of a particular caste group known as the *Patua* who painted narrative scrolls and also occasionally illustrated manuscripts dealing with religious subjects. The craft of the *Patua* was closely allied to the calling pursued by the members of the *Kumbhakara* caste who made images of Hindu gods and goddesses and also made toys and painted pictures during their leisure.

There had been another large field of applied arts employed in the service of the household. These included the craft of the clay modeller, pot maker, metal caster and the like who turned out numerous objects of

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day-to-day use for the average man. Though these are just commonplace objects of familiar use, the ritual utensils, ritual drawings (*alpana*), domestic articles, wraps, bed spreads, hangings, storage jars, wooden caskets, metal or wooden measures and various other things were imbued with a feel of intimate communication of deep thought and profound understanding.

All these objects of traditional art are extremely rich in their design contents and will undoubtedly remain inexhaustible store of inspiration for many long years to artists and producers of industrial objects of the country. Old traditions have been changing under the pressure of changing social circumstances. Shifting economic conditions are also causing great changes in the modes and outlooks of life. Values and psychological attitudes are also in the process of modifications. It is no wonder that under such shifting circumstances the old motifs and traditional symbols will lose their grip upon the people. But even under conditions of sweeping changes human thirst for the sublime and the endeavour of communicating the same from individual to individual will not come to an end all too soon. The significant and the beautiful will continue to attract human mind for yet long, leading to the emergence of new symbols and new designs in the field of applied arts.

Efforts, nonetheless, are yielding appreciable results. In creating new designs the inexhaustible store of traditional arts is being looked into for inspiration. The wealth of the accumulated store of designs is sure to provide endless scope for thought and application.

The necessity for a comprehensive account of the traditional arts of Bengal has been felt for a long time. The subject has been touched in sections by competent authorities but a fuller study could not be ventured into unless a liberal patronage had stepped forward in order to finance such a scheme. Many rich information and considerable faithful material pertaining to the cultural traits of the people of Bengal can be traced in the traditional arts that have served the people so long and well. These art objects have not only provided pleasure to eyes but have also given spiritual nourishment to the people by way of emotional satisfaction and æsthetic pleasure.

For long I have felt a desire of writing about the glorious traditional arts of Bengal and my association with the Asutosh Museum may have given me some equipment for doing the same. To-day I am indeed happy and my debts will only be partly repaid as I express my gratitude to the Directorate of Industries, West Bengal, especially to Sri N. K. Biswas I.A.S., for having offered me this opportunity of presenting a study of the traditional arts of Bengal mainly from design point of view. This survey

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may go a long way in the effort made by the Directorate for regenerating the local industries and help the producers with a stock of old and useful designs the fund of which is rich beyond comprehension. These designs have their attractiveness and visual appeal of a deeply absorbing nature. But if the traditional designs are to be fruitfully utilised the inner meanings resting at the base of every design will have to be considered with due esteem.

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CHAPTER TWO

Textiles undoubtedly offer limitless scope for display of designs. It is not just an accident that textiles have been varied and widespread in India and as such in Bengal. Dress and dress-material have been matters of no mean concern of peoples all over the world because of various utility of dress. From ordinary wraps fashioned out of animal skins or leaves or barks of trees man has gradually taken to designed costumes of various types, made of wide variety of materials. Unceasing has been the quest for new and also synthetic material. It was a great triumph on the part of man when he had learnt to spin flossy material into threads and weave those into fabrics. Animal hair may have been the earliest material to be spun into threads but the discovery of plant-wool that is cotton had undoubtedly been a revolutionary step in the development of weaving. It is generally accepted that the Chinese discovered the technique of manufacturing silk. India, however, has been a veritable home of many types of fabrics including silk that have delighted throughout ages not only the wearers but also those who have seen the fabrics worn by others.

It is not merely the body or the texture of the fabrics that has gained appreciation. Textile fabrics have been made great fountains of delight by many people of the world because of colour and patterns of decoration imbued in those fabrics by way of weaving, dyeing and printing. India has been one of the greatest manufacturers of textile fabrics noted for texture as well as varying designs formed of colour and patterns of endless types, and Bengal can lay her claims to a major share of this distinction. Of the numerous Indian varieties of textiles, quite a few have been contributed by the craftsmen of this part of the country.

Of the fabrics used for weaving, wool or animal hair has been one of the very popular materials used in different parts of the world, but not so much in Bengal because of climatic conditions here. Woollens are usually favoured as warm clothing and have been mostly brought from outside. Cotton and silk, however, have been manufactured here from very early times. The Jaina *Acharanga Sutra*, a text of 5th-4th cent. B.C. had known the inhabitants of the *Radha* country (modern Burdwan region) to be taking exception to persons that might stray undraped in the streets. The terracotta figures found from different parts of Bengal and datable from three or four hundred years before Christ bear eloquent testimony to the

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existence of dress consciousness among the inhabitants of Bengal. Still later, stone figures so liberally sculptured in Bengal also reveal evidence of widespread use of textiles of very fine texture and not unoften decorated with designs, for draping the body. To the Persians cotton was known as '*Sindon*', a product hailing from the region of the river Indus. Thousands of years before Christ, mummified human bodies of Egypt, were bandaged in folds of fine Muslin that scholars consider as having been imported from India. Pieces of cotton cloth dyed in madder had also been traced from the ruins of Mohenjo-daro. Bengal has been traditionally reputed as a home of fine cotton cloth from a very early time and the presumption that Muslins traced on Egyptian Mummies or at Mohenjo-daro had been secured from Bengal may not be totally unwarranted. Cotton and silk fabrics of Bengal have vied with each other for eminence and reputation and if judiciously pursued may still hold their own for many years to come.

The most colourful silk fabrics of Bengal widely acclaimed for their quality and appeal have in recent times been produced at a place called Baluchar near Murshidabad and had acquired its trade name from the place of its origin. The weavers of this place had earned celebrity, as the stuff produced by them acquired a high technical perfection and had endowed the product with a considerable visual appeal. Usually, the Baluchar products are found either as full length *Sari* or square-shaped *Rumal* or cover, characterised by a distinctive ground colour in each individual piece, known in endless variety of shades. Red, purple, blue and yellow colours are the more distinctive shades used that added character and grace to the finished products. Orange or yellow grounds though rare were used by some producing characteristic effect, while blue or purple colours became the rule.

The chief distinctiveness of the Baluchar rests in the designs found upon the body of the textiles, the two borders and above everything the *anchla* or the skirt end of the cloth. These designs were all woven with specially dyed threads of silk. It is probable that originally the motifs or the designs were drawn on paper and the threads were to follow the designs thus drawn. Decorations on the grounds are found constituted of simple *butis* in the form of either a *Kalka* motif or more popularly in floral motifs of various kinds. These decorations gave rise to the name *butidar* meaning decorated with motifs or *butis*. The charming *butidar sari* can very well be compared to a piece of land strewn with flowers dropped on it or more appropriately with the quiet moonless sky scintillating with stars shimmering upon its soft texture. The appeal of the *butidar* ornamentation was created with subtle and intelligent use of refined, intricate and sensitive

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patterns. In the accompanying illustrations one of the *butidars* has eight petalled flowers to fill the purple ground, there being three varieties of the flowers in white, green, white and red arranged in diagonal rows. In another *sari* the *butis* are constituted in the form of tiny *kalka* motifs placed with the broad base sidewise flanked with two dots on two ends filling the ground with abundance (fig. 9). The two horizontal ends of the *saris* are almost invariably found banded with some bold device in order to match the ornamental expanse of the ground together with the border *anchla*, the most ornate sector of the entire scheme. In the purple *sari*, a strand of floral motifs alternated with white leaves forms the horizontal bands as well as the vertical terminals while in the other one, a close and boldly designed flower flanked by a motif formed of four *kalkas* in groups of two placed back to back creates a smoothly gliding rhythm quite worthy of modern adaptation. *Anchla* design being the most important part of the decorative scheme of the *butidars*, the artist weaver spared no pain in lavishing his technical skill as well as his sense of ornamental precision in creating his *anchla* designs in the most engrossing manner. Usually, at the *anchla* end of the *sari*, an area formed of the entire breadth of the piece, four to five feet in length, was made into an enclosed rectangle, the inner part marked with broad borders having four rows of dexterous patterns to cover the entire area with a settled scheme. The inner rectangle was almost as a rule filled with large size *kalkas* arranged in rows. The *kalkas* used in these inner areas of the *anchla* offer extremely interesting shapes and constitute some of the finest variants of the *kalka* design used in Indian art. The *kalka* is one of the most widely disseminated ornamental motifs adopted in Indian tradition and is usually supposed to approximate a highly stylised leaf; its evolution as an ornamental motif may be traced from painted manuscripts of Mughal and proto-Mughal days. Individual artists and designers have taken wide liberty in shaping their respective *kalka* motifs within the framework of the tectonic shape of the *kalka*. Consequently, there has been hundreds and thousands of varying forms of the *kalka* used in the various fields of decoration and the silk weavers of Baluchar had made the utmost use of the shape provided by their extremely interesting motif of ornamentation. The *kalkas* used as field covering in the form of *butis* or on horizontal border were usually tiny in shape, treated in a mechanical way in order to provide the required result. But the large *kalkas* in the inner rectangles of the *anchla* provided the weavers a freedom of imagination giving rise to *kalka* forms of a considerable variety. Each of these *kalkas* primarily approximates a ground enclosed by a semi-circular base, the body narrowing towards the neck where it bends sidewise to

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be twisted downwards where the two ends of the enclosing lines meet. The shape bears noticeable proximity to the shape of the mango fruit so well adopted in the ornamental scheme of the paintings at Ajanta. Keeping within the framework of this basic shape the *kalka* designers, wherever they have adopted it, in painting, relief work, printing or weaving, have filled the inner body and the outer perimeter and occasionally the base under the semicircular end with numerous decorative devices, linear or floral in character.

Among the many varieties of *kalkas* met with in the Baluchar *saris* those represented here offer extremely interesting shapes. The *kalkas* in the inner rectangle of the *anchlas* shown in fig. 9 rest on a base of twigs, and are depicted by borders of long branches having small coniferous leaves. The core enclosed by a *kalka* design placed reverse to the outer enclosure has helped in creating an extremely pleasing effect in ornamentation. This design has an appeal of considerable charm and can possibly be adopted in modern decoration with advantage. The frame around the inner field of the *anchla* is also quite fascinating for its precision and boldness. The *kalkas* in the two other *saris* are also characteristic in their own way. The peculiar semicircular motifs inside the *kalkas* (Frontispiece) bear close resemblance to the shell motif found in Mohenjo-daro while the upper ends of the *kalkas* show a treatment resembling the beak of a bird. The blue and the yellow *sari* has *kalkas* with similar motifs having wavy stalk-like ornament with flowers blossoming at the top. The typical Baluchar characteristic of the *saris* rests in the figured designs around the border of the inner compartment of the *anchla* contained in the architectural compartments (fig. 9) or in continuous friezes (fig. 10). These figured panels of the *saris* depict subjects, ranging from the fields of religious and day-to-day life to social scenes depicting court and high society people, the Muslims or Europeans in their typical costume or even a railway engine to vouch for the ready adaptability of the weaver and his strong awareness of the world around. The designs, though highly stylised and removed from naturalism, accomplish many complicated compositions with precision. The designs collected here also represent several quite interesting subjects treated with exceptional deftness. One of the designs shows two Europeans seated face to face on two couches on two sides of a table. Both are in full costume, light tunic coat and long trousers, hats and shoes, one shown with a fan-shaped thing in his hand, the other probably drinking from a goblet, while a decanter-like flask is shown on the table. A corresponding motif repeated in another *sari* shows a European lady sitting on a divan under a *samiana* held upon nicely carved wooden posts. The lady wears

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a blue hat and blue full-armed blouse, a long skirt and a blue stocking. She holds a bunch of flowers in her raised left hand and an ornamental fan in her right. The rider in the other *sari*, having a parasol upon her head with floral motifs floating around, gives the impression of the princess of the folk legends of Bengal, out on her journey towards unknown lands.

The figured designs of the *sari* reproduced in the frontispiece provide yet another example of extremely ornate and elaborate designing. The inner court in the *anchla* instead of being horizontal as in most cases is a vertical one and is occupied by a solitary *kalka* upon black ground. The inner court is enclosed by a motif of a lady riding a horse with a fancy parasol upon the head, a fan-shaped object upon the head of the richly caparisoned horse, and a long pigtail dangling at the back of the damsel who could very well be a dandy of the royal court. The most important design is, however, to be met with along the outer border depicting an interesting wheeled contraption, possibly a railway train with the engine in front driven by the standing driver; a peacock with raised plumage sits upon the arched roof of the engine while at the back of the engine is a double-storied coach with two couples sitting in the two decks. The driver and the other occupants of the train are all shown in European costume.

The history of silk *sari* goes back to a very early age and may be traced from mediæval literature of Bengal. Silk *saris* were commonly called *patsari* and were known in many varieties. In the *Vaishnaba padavali* literature, *Radha* is often depicted as being forbidden by her mother-in-law to wear *kala pater sari* since the name *kala* (*i.e. Krishna*) was too irritating for her ear. *Agun pater sari* or *agni pat sari* was a variety of quite expensive textile and could only be used by courtesans or girls of rich family. The words applied to the different types of *saris* indicate colours in which the *saris* were dyed while undyed pieces were probably known as *kancha pat sari* (*saris* made of raw silk). The word *pat* in Bengali had been derived from Sanskrit '*patta*' and though some would consider it to mean vegetable fibre, there is little doubt that *pater sari* in Bengali stood for *saris* made of silk. Silk *saris* have also been manufactured at Bishnupur in Bankura and these *saris* were also distinguished for designs of various kinds (fig. 1). In recent times, large-scale manufacture of silk *saris* is done in Murshidabad and Calcutta and these *saris* are being printed with wide varieties of ornamentation. Woven designs are also attempted, but a thorough study of the designs met with in these traditional forms may lead to greater absorption of pleasing and meaningful character from earlier times.

Like the *butidar saris* of Baluchar, the traditional *Daccai* is also now

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at the verge of extinction; but this type of textile was at one time highly appreciated at home and abroad and was considered as the finest variety of hand-spun weaving ever made. The cotton textile of India enjoyed considerable popularity in Roman society during the early centuries of the Christian era and in mediæval and late mediæval times bulks of fine textile were exported to European countries including England. A large share of this industry was centered round Dacca and weavers insisted on threads of unbelievably fine texture which could only be spun by very soft fingers. Like the silk *saris*, cotton *saris* were also known in many varieties bearing names which however seldom give any idea about the place of their manufacture or of technique. Only the colour of the *saris* or the variegated nature of their design can to some extent be inferred from the names which occur in mediæval Bengali literature. A very famous variety of *sari* was known as '*Gangajali*' probably for its cool and soft feel and crystal white colour. While this variety of cloth was adored for its texture, other names, such as, '*Meghadambur*' (dark cloud), '*Nilambari*' (blue sky), '*Mayurpekham*' (tail of a peacock), '*Asmantara*' (star-studded sky), '*Agniful*' (flowers of fire) are significant for their respective colour and designs. '*Meghadambur*' and '*Nilambari*' *saris* were textiles of fine texture coloured dark or blue. '*Mayurpekham*' *saris* are well-represented in textiles of multi-hued body while '*Asmantara*' and '*Agniful*' represented *saris* with floral designs of various shapes (see figs. 2-6).

A very well-known variety of *Daccai* cloth was known as '*Jamdani*'. In these fabrics designs were embroidered in a highly distinctive manner. The names of these '*Jamdani*' *saris* were determined by the character of their designs. Some of the *saris* interspersed with ornaments of repetitive motifs were also known as the *butidar*. The designs that were wrought diagonally were known as the '*tercha*'. As a rule the *Jamdanis* were extremely ornate in their design quality and were masterpieces of workmanship. The chief designs in the *Jamdani saris* constituted clever arrangement of floral forms in various shapes, circular, *kalka* shaped, pyramidal, and the like. Geometrical designs of different varieties may also be found in the *Jamdani saris* (fig. 6).

Another variety of cloth embroidered with *muga* silk or cotton threads were known as *Kashidas*. In the *kashida* cloth, the entire ground of the pieces was covered with designs made according to a specified plan. An excellent *kashida* reproduced here shows borders with wavy lines; upon blue ground are floral designs in red thread and the inner area is covered with corner *kalkas*. The circular and floral designs are also in red thread (figs. 7-8).

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The *Kashidas* were originally produced in the City of Dacca by weavers belonging to the *Basak* community. These textiles were meant mainly for export to middle eastern countries, particularly to Saudi Arabia, Persian Gulf territories, Tunis, Morocco and Malta. Turkey was at one time a great patron of the *Kashida* textile and imported large quantities. Many members of this Basak community are now in West Bengal and are still pursuing their craft with great zeal.

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CHAPTER THREE

The village fair popularly known as the *mela* was at one time a very important social event in the rural life of Bengal. In such fairs held during a specified time in the year, traditional toys of different kinds appeared in a large variety and were offered as a very popular item for sale. With the change of time the character of the fairs is getting changed and traditional toys are distinctly losing their popularity. The time is not very far off when these toys will altogether vanish from the scene.

The toys were chiefly intended to be used as children's play things but a study of the form and character of these toys would reveal that those were not just products of playful imagination meant merely for children's satisfaction. The animals and the human figures offered for sale as toys have close affinity in shape and character to figures used as votive offerings or in connection with rituals performed by women in Bengali household. The similarity between the toys and those ritual figures could not naturally escape the inquisitive eyes of the children. At times, women, preparing votive figures in clay or rice paste for use in connection with some ritual such as the worship of *Sasthi*, the goddess of child birth, would pass on, to their great delight, some of the figures to the children to play with. While playing with these figures naturally the children would try to learn about the significance of the figures. The shape, the form, the colour and the characteristics of the toys transcended their visual appearance and became imbued with significances associated with folk and ritual traditions of the country. The toys as such had become deep repositories of a long sustaining culture and an emotional content evolved by tradition. These folk toys are no exclusive product of any particular region of Bengal. In fact toys are found from many other parts of India as well. But nowhere probably the art of toymaking has been pursued as vigorously as in Bengal. The toys made in different parts of Bengal have not been exactly similar in shape and character. Almost every district here, or probably still smaller units have been producing toys that may reveal some characteristics particular to that region. These regional differences, however, imbued the toys with fresh colours and vitality and saved those from degenerating into commonplace objects of hackneyed and monotonous character.

The toys are known in a large variety of shapes. There are human figures rendered in different styles and shown in number of poses and

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attitudes. Female figures in this series far outnumber male figures and figures bearing child in lap appear to have been extremely popular. Among the animals, horses and elephants had been much too popular as compared to others, while some birds can also be enumerated among the toys.

A number of materials were used for making the toys among which clay being the cheapest was used in an extensive scale. Apart from clay the toy-makers have also used wood, pith, cloth, sawdust, papier-maché and many such things for making figures of various kinds.

Toy-making has not been an exclusive occupation of any particular group of people of the country. Those who have produced the toys, however, belong to castes professionally engaged in some allied branch of art, toy-making being an ancillary occupation pursued at spare time for the purpose of supplementing their income.

Figures in clay are mostly produced by people belonging to the *Kumbhakara* caste whose chief occupation is to prepare earthenware pots; these people are also proficient in making icons or creed-images of Hindu gods and goddesses. The *Patuas* or *Chitrakaras* in different parts of Bengal, some of whom were converted to Islam in the past, also make these toys as a secondary occupation. Wooden toys are produced chiefly by persons belonging to the *Sutradhara* or carpenter caste. Toys made of pith are usually produced by men of the *Malakar* or garland-maker caste whose main occupation is the making of various decorations required for embellishing images made of clay. Dolls made of worn-out cotton cloth have been made by women belonging to different castes. Women belonging to families of the *Chitrakara*, *Sutradhara* and *Malakara* castes are also quite expert in turning out toys of various kinds. The women offer their wares for sale, thus making out an independent income for themselves. The women's products are no less significant in form or character than the wares turned out by men and preserve various trends of toy making evolved in this country. It is probable that the art of making toys has been preserved by these castes hereditarily from very ancient days and in course of time different castes have evolved different patterns and shapes. This accounts for the wide variety in form and character found in the ritual figures and toys made in this country.

The clay figures are usually burnt in fire before use but some are also used in an unbaked state. Made in different techniques these reveal an astounding variety of styles. On an average these figures can be divided into two broad classes: the hand-made type and the mould-made ones. The hand-made figures are usually primitive in characteristic and show economy of effort and treatment. In case of human figures, hands are

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often made in the shape of stumps and the legs are left unspecified. The predominant feature in the face happens to be a beak-like nose pinched out of an unspecified lump. The treatment of hair is noticeable in some of the figures while eyes and breasts are indicated in many of these by pellets or lumps fixed in applique. Sometimes small holes are used to indicate eyes and ornaments on the figures. In many others eyebrows, eyes, lips, breasts, ornaments in the arms and legs are shown by means of shallow incised lines. The treatment of the eyes shows interesting variations. Some are almond shaped, some are oblique, another variety is square with small circlets indicating the eyeballs. The same stump like treatment of legs, snub noses, pelleted eyes and shallow ornamental lines characterise many animal figures as well, representing horses, dogs, elephants with fan-like ears, and also probably cats. It may be incidentally mentioned that all these figures do not inevitably represent toys but often carry some magical import and as such contain a significant aspect of the culture of the villages. Wandering on the village by-paths it is not infrequent, that one comes across places underneath big trees where clay figures are found accumulated in number. With branches spreading over the wide areas, these trees stand as guardians over villages and are often associated with village divinities like *Sitala*, *Sasthi*, or *Visalakshi* as the case may be. The Muslims have corresponding places sacred to *Pirs* also characterised by similar assemblages; the figures representing the horse is very common. These horses approximate the toy-horses of hand-made variety with elongated legs and summarily treated features. Forceful and suggestive of movement, these horses would immediately remind one of the horses found from various Kushana sites as well as the animal figures found from the Indus valley. At one time horses were widely used for transport and treasured in every household as a valuable possession. The significance of the assemblage of so many horses at the bottom of trees is not quite clear to the villagers, many of whom would, however, put a figure at the bottom of the tree for the fulfilment of some wish or with the prayer for a wish to be fulfilled at the grace of the presiding spirit of the place.

The practice probably calls for some explanation. In ancient Indian literature one comes across various semi-divine entities living on trees, in wilderness, in streams etc. These were popularly known as *Yaksas* and *Devatas*. Such semi-divine entities had no place in the Vedic hierarchy of gods but simple folks were in the habit of paying their respect to these popular elements. Trees growing in villages, having some conspicuous character were often considered to be the habitat of some particular *devata* and food and other offerings were placed at the botton of these trees in order

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to please or propitiate the spirit. The bottom of such trees were usually fenced by railings. There was a period when some of the Vedic gods were also in the popular belief held as such village guardians. In the early Buddhist monuments one finds frequent representation of many such semi-divine agents, believed to have accepted the supremacy of Buddha and to have paid homage to Him. In the popular imagination, Buddha was also believed as a leader among such spirits. From this popular conception the *Mahayana* Buddhists had evolved a well-regulated throng of gods and goddesses. Though cast in the Vedic mould the Puranic divinities were also indirectly or directly evolved from the tutelary spirits of such popular conception. The official priesthood tried their utmost to give a reformed character to these gods and goddesses and the practice associated with their worship. But the primitive nature of worship of such divinities could not be wholly eradicated and continued to survive in the substratum of the legends associated with the nature of their worship. The worship of the Purnaic deities which involves the adoration of twigs of trees and pots full of water (*Ghata* and *Pallava*) reminds one of the primitive practice of paying homage to trees and streams.

The priestly reforms could not, however, entirely change the nature of the unsophisticated masses living in villages, where the old and traditional tutelary spirits continued to enjoy their privileged position. With these are also found not only the animal figures mentioned above, but also other items mostly of unspecified forms. These unspecified forms in many cases stand for the *Matrikas* and also for such male deities as *Panchananda* and *Babathakur*, while specified forms show the trunkless head of *Dharmathakur* or of *Dakshin Rai* having a high fan-shaped headgear, and representing the guardian of the south and the lord of tigers. The female figures of various forms usually represent *Sitala* or *Sasthi*, the latter variety of which with children in lap, can be found in number at the bottom of sanctified village trees, and are considered sacred to the goddess of child-birth. The cult of *Sasthi*, known in Puranic lore as *Jyestha* Devi and having her counterpart in *Hariti* in the *Mahayana* Buddhist Pantheon has a very old tradition while *Lakshmi*, whom the Puranas made a consort of *Vishnu* had probably evolved from a very popular *Yakshini* known in the ancient times as *Siri* or *Sri* (see fig. 59 for *Dakshin Rai*).

Most of these figures, as described above, show characteristics having close similarity to the primitive terracotta figures found from different parts of the country. It is not unreasonable to think that as the basic idea of the folk-rituals had undergone little substantial change during many thousand years through which the civilization of the Indian people had

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evolved, the basic character of these clay figures also remained unaltered. These have been least affected by the reformist zeal of Brahmanical hierarchy and for many centuries have retained the essence of the rural craft in its nascent form. Classical forms of culture have grown in splendour and have also been lost in oblivion but a plastic consciousness to which numberless multitudes of India have readily reacted for millenniums has remained unaltered in these clay figures found associated with the folk-rituals of Bengal. The owl made by the Patuas of Natungram in Burdwan is an excellent example of the ritual toy that has been widely in vogue in Bengal (fig. 36). Symbolising *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, the owl, made into a highly economised form and painted with brilliant colours, has a powerful decorative effect in the household and has helped in keeping an old tradition alive. The figures of *Sasthi* with one child or more in her lap has been popular as a ritual figure often used in connection with women's rite called *Sasthi vrata* or as a votive offering to be placed under village trees sacred to *Sasthi* (*Sasthitala*). Archetypes of such figures have been traced from Harappan sites while the *matrika* deities conceived in the Puranic tradition might have evolved from this archetype. Similar figures (fig. 41) were widely used as children's playthings as well. These toys, each shown standing or seated with a child in her lap, are interesting examples of abstraction and simplification and carries a tradition of very old origin. The toys are also great repositories of the rich tradition of mythologies and of folk lores that have nursed the children of this country for long. Children learnt the *Krishna* stories and *Rama's* adventures through these toys (figs. 40, 50) or the fairy tales of the winged horse and elephants (figs. 39, 45) reminding the child of the endless adventures of the brave princes into the world of the unknown. People of India have shown particular attraction towards the world of birds and animals around them and this aspect of their nature became manifest in their art. The toys have represented many birds and animals such as the horse (figs. 37 to 39), the elephant, the owl, (figs. 36,) the dove, all of which could convey some symbolic association as with goddess *Lakshmi* in case of the owl or *Sasthi* in case of the cat but those could as well be used as children's playthings. While playing with these toys children not only got initiated in the sustaining traditions in which they were born but also got acquainted with the artistic impulses provided by the figures which they could handle.

From the land of toys one may easily pass on to the large expanse of the temple terracottas that offer an endless variety of forms and composition. In building temples, due to scarcity of stone, Bengal has mainly used bricks. These brick-built temples of Bengal, however, have developed a

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significant form of their own, conditioned by the requirements of their use. With thick massive walls these temples show curvilinear towers built upon sloping roofs and have doorways with multifoil arch. Apart from the interesting structural form these temples are found completely covered with extremely ornate carvings met with upon the walls, chiefly upon the facades. These carvings done on bricks or tiles fixed upon the walls, because of the limited scope inherent in the material, could not acquire the same boldness of relief as met with on the walls of the stone temples in other parts of India. This deficiency of the carving had, however, been compensated by the lyrical grace and rhythmic poise of the compositions while the significance of these carvings from design point of view had been far more effective than those on the stone reliefs elsewhere. When taken in broad sections these temple terracottas executed in shallow relief reveal a comprehensiveness and the linear grace characteristic of mural paintings (fig. 31). Elsewhere in most cases the subjects are accommodated in well-defined frames, square or rectangular in shape and arranged vertically or horizontally upon the temple walls (figs. 11-35).

In many such carvings one finds a singular attachment for pure ornaments formed of linear and floral patterns. These patterns offer endless varieties of composition executed with highly imaginative curves and twists and filled with bulbs and blossoms of imaginary flowers and shoots all integrated into designs of extremely rich and harmonious nature (figs. 25-27). The floral stalks which meander gracefully survive from a very old tradition and retain the concept of the tree of life rich and bounteous in symbolic content. The basic rhythm of these designs was infused in subjects other than the pure ornaments as well. The geese motifs (fig. 28) and the elephant in the famous temple at Baranagar near Beharampore and such other ornamental designs provide unequivocal evidence of such transformation from linear and floral motifs to plant, animal and human motifs that constitute bulk of the decoration in the traditional arts of this country. Subjects represented in the temple terracottas are not very wide in range. The compositions seldom outstep the oft-repeated subjects taken from the *Ramayana* or the life of *Krishna*. But apart from the *Krishna* and *Rama* legends the temple decorations have got various stray subjects lending variety and diversity to the temple surface. The most widely used motif and compositions, however, come from the *Krishna* legend and the story of *Rama*; the lyrical grace and rhythmic execution of these offer a wide range of decorative qualities and testify to the high grade of technical skill and artistic sensibility acquired by the temple carvers of Bengal. No

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composition detarred the artists, no form was beyond their grip. They could bring to life subjects and compositions in a simple but effective manner adding grace and rhythm to those in an effortless professional ease. It is not unoften that the temple carvings could reach considerable artistic height (figs. 13; 34).

The panel showing a herd of deer illustrated here fleeing from some unknown danger has got the qualities of great technical perfection in realising speed and displays a highly animated decorative composition (fig. 17). The artist's susceptibility to rhythmic grace can be traced in the scene of *Bastraharan* where *Krishna* is shown in a sensitive pose sitting on a tree that bends in conformity to the requirement of the mood while the *Gopinis* stare in desperation (fig. 21). Technical adjustment of difficult ornamental composition is met with in a corner showing animal and human figures arranged in a column (fig. 32). Most of the panels are shown in rectangular frames composed vertically or horizontally and reveal the artist's command upon a variety of compositional schemes. Somewhere single figures are shown, either of a deity like *Jagaddhatri* (fig. 24) or of *Balarama* (fig. 33) and the composition tends to bring out the effectiveness of the individual form of the volume and arrangement of the figure in relation to the space upon which those are displayed. In others the relationship between the figures are emphasised by the arrangement of the figures, their pose and gesture, as well as the accessories like the architectural background, dress and ornaments of various kinds. The range of ornamental panels which adorn the temple walls are extremely wide and of varying nature and offer an unlimited scope for developing designs of various kinds.

4206

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CHAPTER FOUR

Man's quest for significant form and colour did not remain confined to objects of art alone. Household objects of day-to-day use also, in the hands of the craftsmen, acquired significance of their own. In most cases, however, utility had been the determinative factor of the shape of the objects used in household. But, even from primitive state of existence, man has shown his preference for shapes and colours of various kinds, not always associated with the utilitarian value of the object. This preference for likeable shape and likeable colour helped in the realisation of the ultimate design of the objects. Once, however, a significant design was evolved, it became integrated with the nature of people among whom it was evolved and became a part of their culture and their very existence. Such designs always acquired some communicable meaning readily understood by the patrons, and the craftsman became the priest of a ritual for uniting a group of people with a common bond of tradition.

In the traditional Bengali household the range of objects necessary for daily use has not been very extensive. The life of the people was simple and requirements were limited. If there was a Nawab or a rich landlord the life and living of those seldom penetrated the rural masses who lived a quiet and uneventful life. Yet in the objects used in the urban as well as the rural household there had been an underlying harmony significant in its ultimate appeal. The houses in which they lived, the beds upon which they slept, the ornaments they wore, the pots and utensils which they used, the *kanthas* and the mats upon which they relaxed, the objects which were associated with their rituals and pastimes were all endowed with a simple yet fascinating character, designed with an eye to enrich the day-to-day life of the people with a simple charm and basic significance understood by all.

The Bengali hut is an architectural device of a highly interesting nature. It combines functional utility with significance of form characterised by an appeal of its own. The inclined thatch of the houses with a curved end at the bottom, designed primarily to cope with the excessive rainfall of the region became a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of the dweller, a part of his very existence. Considerable care and thought were lavished upon the construction of the house from the selection of material to the final touch given upon the decorations on the wall. From the huts were evolved the temples combining the principle of the sloping roof

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with the age-old curvilinear *sikhara* creating an intensely juxtaposed shape, likeable yet frail from design point of view. The mosques made in Bengal in many cases also emulated the same basic design with curved cornice and richly ornamental walls, admitting the local conditions without any prejudice. In designing personal ornaments beads were utilised as elsewhere but emphasis was laid on metal surface wrought with great care to emulate floral shapes of every kind.

Pottery has been one of the oldest crafts produced in India and the variety of pottery forms used in Bengal is wide and often bears significance of a profound nature. Usually, the globular narrow-necked varieties of earthenwares with thick circular rims, known with slight variations, are found used all over Bengal for carrying and storing water. Larger vessels with elongated shape are used for storage while heavy jars with very large rims are also used for storage purposes. Pots are often looked upon to bear symbolic significance and used in connection with ceremonies like marriage when those are found painted with interesting floral decorations with bird and fish motifs, considered as symbols of plenty (fig. 56).

Manufacturers of brass and bellmetal wares in Bengal receive very often from pedlars wandering remote areas old and discarded metal objects for melting. The art of metal casting, as we know, has been practised in India from a very early age and metal sheets are also rendered by beating into objects of diverse shape meant for various use. A variety of these metal wares consists of ordinary utensils of everyday use such as plates, bowls, glasses and the like and places like Khagra and Islampur had earned great reputation for bellmetal ware of considerable merit (fig. 76). Copper has been used for ritual utensils of significant shape (fig. 77) while brass and bronze have been utilised for making lamps, lampstands, braziers and figures of household divinities made in exquisite propositions. The lion figures found as mounts of goddess Durga or as the legs for *Simhasanas* meant for the *Salagram Sila* are typical of Bengal. Having sharp angular snout and almost two dimensional form these metal objects were influenced by the art of painting. Apart from these another interesting variety of metal objects is frequently met with in Bengal having some affinity to the workmanship of the basket weavers. These are the work of a particular type of metal caster called the *Dhokra* smith who are people of nomadic temperament and usually move about with their easily portable implements to produce the required objects at short notice order of patrons on their way. A sizeable colony of these *Dhokras* exists at Ghuskhara in Hooghly District, though the *Dhokras* are also found in Bankura, Manbhum and neighbouring regions of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh as well. The official

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reports classify the *Dhokras* as a subcaste of the *Karmakara* caste. Normally they go from house to house, enquire about the requirements of the individual house owner who would supply them with some old and discarded objects to be recast into the required shape. The highly skilful carftsman at once spreads his little workshop and starts work, first by making the dummy, then the outer casing, allows it to dry, kindles the fire, melts the metal and pours the molten metal into the mould. The required objects are usually made in separate pieces and finally soldered together in order to be given the required shape (figs. 68-75).

The *Dhokras* are normally asked to make lamps and caskets necessary in connection with marriage ceremony. They also make measuring bowls as well as images of gods and goddesses. The lamps are normally made in an elaborate shape with elephants, peacocks and human figures while caskets are made in the shape of miniature huts with sloping roof of the Bengal type or like animal, fish or fruits. Figures of divinities made by the *Dhokras* usually conform to orthodox iconographic requirements in regard to the number of heads, eyes, arms and mounts. But in stylistic representation those differ widely from the orthodox iconograhic types. The form of the peacock is a very favourite motif with the *Dhokra* craftsman and his treatment of the bird with fan-shaped plumes offers a typical design. Another very widely represented form happens to be the elephant, while fish is very common in case of caskets, cast hollow with net-shaped wall. The measuring bowls are made in extremely likeable shapes with walls decorated with solar discs emitting rays as well as motifs showing scorpion, snake and fish. All these animals, birds, reptiles and insects met with in the *Dhokra* metals had deep symbolic contents to be communicated to the susceptible mind of the users who readily reacted to the totemistic significance of these forms and motifs.

The most interesting aspect of the work of the *Dhokra* smith lay, however, in the peculiar treatment of the various objects produced by them. The prototypes are, as a rule, made in resin laid in strips round an earthen core. Then the whole thing is covered with mud and is bound by bark of some tree. When this outer casing is dry, metal is poured through a hole while the liquefied resin escapes through other holes left at the bottom. The wall of the finished objects released from the shell retains the stripped appearance of the work-model approximating basketry designs from which apparently these objects were originally adopted. The matted and looped appearance of the objects are strongly reminiscent of cane work so well known in these parts of India. While the animals and other forms offered a somewhat primitive appeal, the *Dhokras* probably excelled

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in the shapes of various fish and fruits cast hollow, having net-like wall, no two of which were alike and which showed in what simple and effortless manner the *Dhokra* could create forms of endless charm (fig. 73).

Of the other varieties of objects connected with the rituals performed in Hindu household painted earthenware dishes known as *Saras* are worthy of mention. The *Saras* are made in varying sizes from 10″ to 2½′ in diameter and are shallow on the inner side and convex on the outer. Normally, earthenware saucers of this type are used as covers of large earthenware vessels with wide mouths but the artists had found the shape quite handy for purposes of painting figures of divinities worshipped as substitutes for large clay images which are pretty expensive for persons of modest means. The *Sara*, which is circular in shape has been very cleverly utilised by the folk painter to bring out the charm of brush stroke upon a surface which inclines towards the edge providing an interesting and lively tone to the painting. Usually the surface is found divided into sectors, the larger one being occupied by the principal figure while the adjoining sectors accommodate ancillary subjects drawn from myths connected with the principal figure. Such *Sara* paintings were very popular in East Bengal and was mostly prevalent in Dacca and Faridpore. The colours used in the *Saras* are yellow, red and green with an occasional blue, while the lines which constitute the figures are strongly reminiscent of the drawing of the *pat* painting (fig. 58). Closely allied to this type of painting are the painted playing cards popularly known as *Ganjifa*, examples of which are chiefly known from Vishnupur in Bankura. Though there is close similarity to be found between the paintings done on these cards and the *pat* style of painting, in the physical form and architectural setting on these cards one may trace proximity to the style noticed in the folk paintings of Orissa (fig. 62). Along with the playing cards one may recall other accessories of pastime and attention may be drawn to the musical instruments known in a large variety of shapes. Here has been reproduced the upper portion of a string instrument which with its ribbed knobs, hollow bulb-shaped percussion accessory and ivory inlay work offers a very well-balanced design work worthy of adaptation for any suitable purpose (fig. 67).

Bengal had become a seat of fine ivory work as well and apart from inlaying on wooden surface, ivory was also shaped into jewellery, caskets and toys of various kinds. Murshidabad has been a great centre of ivory carving and beautifully shaped boats fitted with tiny figures complete with significant costumes done by the local craftsmen have received wide admiration (fig. 66).

Pith or *Sola* is another material extensively utilised for various art

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works and with implements can be created into shapes of various kinds. Usually pith has been used for making toys like birds as well as for decorating clay images with ornaments and costumes of wide variety. Masks made of pith and painted with bright colours are found to be quite favourite wares of sale in many fairs (fig. 60).

Maslandpur in Midnapore had earned great fame as a centre of mat weaving and some of the mats produced there can claim to be quite distinguished for the woven design met with in them. The distinctive feature of these designs is constituted in a broad border formed of wavy lines with lozenge patterns and *Kalka* motifs all created with reeds dyed with specific colours (fig. 65). Various other objects such as hangings known as *Sika* or *Joth* and woven strips made of hemp fibre used for packing things also show design consciousness of the average householder in Bengal (fig. 63).

.Along with the painted earthenware mention may be made of painted *Kulo* or trays made of bamboo strips having semicircular end normally used for winnowing grains. But on special occasions such as marriage, painted *Kulos* with the inner surface decorated with traditional designs are utilised as ceremonial objects having auspicious import. The design of the painting usually shows a large lotus at the centre with wavy creeper designs around (fig. 57).

The ritual aspect of the *Sara* has its parallel in the masks of a folk divinity known as *Dakshin rai* or *Dakshinduar* (the door of the south) the celebrated tiger-god of the Sundarban area. Only the head of the god is made usually with an inverted earthenware vase with a circular rim used as the base. The face of the deity is shown with large eyes having big black pupils, horizontal eyebrows, semicircular lip and chin and a large fan-shaped headgear painted at the top and decorated with a lotus at the centre enclosed by border rimmed with white triangular motifis indicating rays. The entire idea and execution of the device call for strong visual perception as well as considerable grasp and aptitude for creating form of a significant nature (fig. 59). Similar technique of form and ornaments is met with in figures of *Banbibi*, *Dharmathakur*, *Sitala* and *Visalakshi* to be found in different parts of Bengal.

The word '*Kantha*' has no satisfactory etymological derivative from any Sanskritic root. It is, however, a universally known and a widely used word in Bengal. *Kantha* is at once understood as a wrap made by a particular technique; but textile fragments made into sheets by stitching may be of varied size and used for different purposes such as bedspread, book or mirror cover or the like. In a remote way these are also wraps and could be

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called *Kanthas* but in each case they go by different names. The bedspreads are commonly known as *Sujni kanthas* while mirror wraps as *Arsilata.*

The *Kantha,* however, is not a wrap of an ordinary type. It is made of old and worn-out pieces of cloth, several pieces being taken at a time to be made into one *Kantha.* The stitcher adjusts the required thickness of the sheet instinctively, for it must not be too thin nor too thick. Patch work in textile is usually held to bear some significant symbolism, especially the use of the worn cloth. But the use of worn-out cloth appears to have been more utilitarian than symbolic. One acquainted with the climate of Bengal would know this point of utility. The seasons being well marked, the smooth change over from autumn to winter takes place through '*Hemanta*', a season not much well defined elsewhere in India; the winter can be fairly cold with accompanying frost and may indicate some thick wrap; but for *Hemanta* a lighter wrap is indicated.

At the outset broad pieces of cloth are carefully selected for the work, not from *Saris* worn by the women but the men's *dhotis* as a rule; but the clothes selected are to be of uniform fabric and texture. Before the advent of mill-made cloth the textiles would be necessarily homespun and hand-woven and had a delightful texture which due to continuous use would become soft and delicate. The fabrics after selection were washed in *bashna,* a home-made washing detergent, rendering these cloths as white as possible. Then were the coloured borders torn off from the *dhutis* and the pieces made into uniform size according to measurements. Standard *Kanthas* would usually measure 7′ 6″ × 3′ 6″ suitable for use by an adult; but others would be of different size; smaller ones for children or as wraps for boxes, books, mirrors while bigger ones as bedspreads. Then, from out of the pieces were collected long threads both white and coloured, which would be used for the purpose of sewing. The sheets were then spread upon a mat, flat and unwrinkled, one upon the other, five or six pieces in all, care being taken so that none of the sheets gets rolled or crumpled in any way. The first sewing was to be done with white threads, five or six strings of thread being put into the needle at one time. The stitching would then start from one end, lengthwise, and go round the corners coming back to the starting point. By this first stitching a sort of border was secured, the ends of the cloth pieces being twisted inside. The borders were then stitched with coloured threads, yellow, red and blue in succession. These again are the three principal colours, the blue sometimes substituted by green or black, bearing on the inherent symbolism of three basic qualities *Satva, Raja* and *Tama,* present in every item of creation. These are also symbolic of the earth, sky and space—the successive stages of existence. The surface is

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then often compartmented into several segments with a central square with offsets on four sides. These compartments are marked with different types of designs forming lines, often geometrical but sometimes also floral and vegetal in miniature motifs. The compartments are then filled in with the required designs in regular stitches that followed previously drawn thin lines in charcoal pencils.

The real attraction and significance of the *Kantha* lay in the multiform designs filling the central compartment and the segments around; also the beautiful patterns adorning the borders and the demarcating lines are of no less consideration from decorative point of view. The layout of the designs has a loosely fixed pattern which is followed almost universally by the makers of the *Kantha*. In this pattern apart from the borders and the compartment there is always to be a central lotus shown as fully blossomed with outstretched petals. In addition to this lotus there is also to be found designs representing luxurious trees with branches thrown in wavy exuberance towards all directions. The *Kalka* and trees having ball-shaped flowers resembling the ever-resplendent *Kadamba* are also of frequent occurrence. The rest of the decorations are found to vary from *Kantha* to *Kantha*. These decorations include human beings in different costumes, and different poses, figures of animals both known as well as imaginary, variety of objects such as temples, brick mansions, thatched huts, boats (steamers!), chariots, carts (engine-drawn trains!), palanquins, throne-chairs, tables, beds, *hukka* (hubble bubble), *dhenki* (husking contrivance), utensils of day-to-day use, boxes for keeping betel leafs, nut-crackers, caskets for keeping wearing apparels and ornaments, mirrors, combs, books, book-stands and such other things of various types (figs. 78-81).

There are two types of designs : one giving illustrations of some well-known story either from some epic, preferably from the *Ramayana* or *Krishnalila*, the other illustrating some legends connected with popular folk rituals known in Bengal as *Vrata*. The designs have their appeal both as products of art-consciousness of spontaneous growth and the creative aptitude for symbolic communication.

The composition of the panels speaks of age-old experience in layout and creation of pleasing patterns. In this composition the trees, the flowers, the human beings, and the inanimate objects exist in complete harmony with each other. These, however, do not appear as things of usual everyday life but the colours used in creating these patterns make them exist in the world of dreamy imagination. The artist does not take any concern of form or colour in real life. She has her own notion about the forms of the objects she wants to depict and her idea of colour reflects the extent of choice and

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freedom enjoyed by the artist. Nevertheless she is supremely confident in her workmanship and never suffers from any inadequacy of power in fulfilling her errand. Sometimes her figures are made with summary outline and filled with very few variations in the body colours. Elsewhere she is meticulous in her details and conjures up as many spectacles of colours upon the body as possible. Again one comes across outlines drawn by continuous stitches and blue, red and yellow body colours with such variants as green and black. The colours used are bright and juxtaposed in a concert of gradations. The artistic designs on the *Kanthas* almost invariably play a most pleasing note of mottled harmony, gay, vivacious and full of life. Though unsophisticated and untutored, the women artists of Bengal have left in these *Kanthas* a lasting memorial to their artistic sensibility, and deep consciousness of primeval form and colour (figs. 80-81).

But apart from the consciousness of line and colour the *Kanthas* also carry impress of another aspect of Bengali mind, the susceptibility to symbols. All the patterns and the figures on the *Kanthas* are invariably imbued with some symbolic meaning. The patterns may be divided into several groups. The central lotus is the most conspicuous of the designs in the *Kantha*. The lotus is a well-known symbolic motif in Indian art and can be traced from the earliest phase of artistic impression in history. The lotus in the *Kanthas* resembles the lotus motif found on the *stupa* railings of Bharhut and also corresponds to the immense lotus which occupies an important position in the decorative designs of Bengal. The tree and the creepers on the *Kanthas* also have their counterparts in the wavy creeper designs so well known in Indian art from as early as the days of Bharhut railings. Of the objects of day-to-day use one comes across jewellery such as necklace, bracelets, bangles, earrings, caskets, books, combs, mirrors and similar other things. These objects are often found unconnected with any illustrative panels which belong to a different group in the decoration of the *Kantha*. Along with these freely existing objects can be traced also such animals, as elephants and horses, palanquins, flowery trees and arboreals full of deer and peacocks, houses with sitting couples in full attire or costume and jewellery or palaces tiered with balconies and friezes. Excepting falling in sequence in the patterns of decoration these exist as independent objects calling for explanation. A third group of decoration reveals illustrations of legends most of which can be identified as legends from the *Ramayana* or the life of *Krishna* but there are other legends as well, many of which cannot be satisfactorily identified.

The first group of the lotus and the creepers and the second group of

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the freely existing objects have close parallel in the decoration of ancient art of India while the third group has its counterpart in the painted scrolls of Bengal known as the *pat*. All these contribute to the magical and protective character of the *Kantha*. *Alpana*, as is well known, is used in connection with simple rituals performed by the married as well as unmarried women of Bengal. Usually a lotus occupies the central position of the decorations while symbols of the sun and the moon occupy two top corners. Strewn around the lotus can be traced wavy design of lotus-stalks connecting the pictures of objects, such as jewellery, caskets, ears of corns, houses, domestic animals like the elephant and the horse and the like. The *chhadas* or the rhymes which are parts of the *vrata* rituals clearly reveal that the lotus and the creepers stand for the wish-fulfilling agents while the accompanying items appearing, like the hieroglyphs, reveal the concrete objects of desire cherished by the performer of the ritual. The designs in the *Kantha* like the ritual designs in *Alpana* invariably bear the same symbolism, the desire and the magic of its fulfilment.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Many scholars have said that the tradition of sculpture in Bengal cannot be a very old one. Bengal has no source of sculpturable stone and until stone could be obtained from Rajmahal hills situated within the limits of ancient Anga or Champa, stone-sculpture could not be undertaken here in a mentionable scale. But it cannot be comprehended that no other material was used here for making sculpture before this period. There was no scarcity of wood and metal casting has been practised in India from a fairly early date. Complete absence of sculpture in any material in Bengal, if there was a civilization in this part of India, cannot be fully warranted.

The earliest stone sculpture so far known in Bengal comes from Chandraketugarh in 24-Parganas. This sculpture is a small fragmentary figure of Buddha and is now displayed in the Asutosh Museum. Made in red sand-stone of Mathura and datable about the 1st century A.D., this figure was in all probability brought to Bengal from that region. A figure of *Vishnu* found from a place called Hankrail and another one representing *Surya* hailing from Niyamatpur, both in North Bengal (now in the Rajshahi Museum) are stylistically attributed to the later part of the Kushana period. There are several other stone sculptures of the pre-*Pala* age to be met with upon the basement walls of the terraced brick temple of Paharpur in the Rajshahi district while an excellent 7th century bronze image of *Sarvani* which is now lost but was found from Tippera, offered a strong evidence regarding the antiquity of the tradition in Bengal. Some 13th century wooden sculptures of high quality, found from Vikrampur in Dacca district and now to be found in the Dacca Museum complete the record of the three most important material, stone, metal and wood having been used in Bengal from a very early time in order to realise the plastic or the three dimensional form.

There was an age when want of stone was probably adequately compensated by the use of clay. A terracotta female figure belonging to about the 2nd century B.C. was discovered from a place called Pokharna in Bankura district about twenty-five years from now. Since then different ancient sites in Bengal have yielded a large number of figures made of clay. Among these, the sites of Bangarh in Dinajpur, Tamluk in Midnapore and Chandraketugarh in 24-Parganas have been most important. Of the figures so far known, representations of the female form far outnumber others. A

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large variety of seals and plaques made in clay are found to contain representation of various scenes while figures of animals like the elephant, bull and ram either with or without rider, and provided with wheels have also been found in abundance. These were either ritual objects or toys. The general mass of figures, mostly showing well-groomed graceful forms elegantly dressed in fine diaphanous cloth and trinkets of various kinds probably reveals the vestiges of a civilization which at one time existed in the estuarian region of Bengal, the traces of which long forgotten civilization are found faintly preserved in the folk tales of the state. Later, large-size figures also were made in clay as are found upon the walls of the Buddhist temple at Paharpur. The tradition continues in the clay images of cult divinities which are made in Bengal for seasonal worship. From design point of view these clay images are of considerable importance. Each and every part of the images is constituted of significant form and pattern and variegated colours not only add jest to the figures but render those rich in symbolic content (fig. 54).

In building temples, it has already been said, Bengal had preferred to use bricks. These brick-built temples of Bengal, however, had developed a significant form of their own, conditioned by the requirements of the material and weather. Having thick massive walls, these temples are characterised by curvilinear towers placed upon sloping roofs and low doorways with multifoil arch. Apart from the typical structural form these temples are found further characterised by extremely ornate carvings done on bricks or tiles fixed upon the walls. Because of the limitations inherent in the material, these terracotta carvings could not acquire the same boldness of relief as met with on the walls of the stone temples in other parts of India. This drawback in the carvings was, however, amply compensated by the lyrical and rhythmic grace of the compositions while the significance of these carvings from design point of view had been far more effective than those found on the stone reliefs elsewhere. When looked at with care these temple terracottas executed in shallow relief reveal a comprehensiveness and a linear grace which are commonly met with in mural paintings and are considered to be a virtue of the same.

In many such carvings one finds a great fascination for pure ornaments formed of linear and floral patterns. These decorations show many types of composition showing highly imaginative curves and twists and filled with bulbs and blossoms of imaginary flowers all integrated into designs of extremely rich and beautiful shape.

Wood has been a very widely utilised medium employed in the service of design. Originally it was the chief medium for construction. Large-scale

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use of timber for structural purposes characterised the early civilization of the country. Structures with sloping roofs resting upon strong posts and massive beams of wood were imitated in artificial rock-cut caves of ancient India. Such wooden structures were originally probably decorated with carvings shown upon pillars, architraves, lintels and such other component parts of architecture. Surfaces upon pillars provided scope for full-scale representations of human figures while other structural parts provided scope for the adoptation of human, animal, plant or geometrical motifs formed in decorative character. Such decorative devices were evolved in order to counteract drabness and help architecture grow warm and lively. Wood also was considered a very suitable material for the making of images usually finished by application of the required colour and made to wear actual ornaments and costumes. Each work in wood is found to have the particular feel of the material and its characteristic quality. A wooden panel illustrated here is found to have some affinity to the compartmental treatment met with in terracotta (figs. 82-84). This panel found from Dacca and now preserved in the Gurusaday Museum, displays an extremely interesting design formed with a very strange array of figures representing the *Matrikas* or the mother goddesses or *Saktis* of the different Brahmanical deities like *Indra*, *Vishnu*, *Siva*, *Kartikeya*, *Brahma* and *Nrishimha*. The figures of the divinities are modelled with bulbous swaying forms, and the rhythm of their graduated movement and emotional oscillation of the limbs are found enclosed in spaced composition within separate frames. In another panel displaying a pastoral scene showing *Krishna* and *Balarama* being dressed for their day's frolicks, the human figures have been rendered almost in the round but in profile view, a technique which is highly interesting from design point of view (figs. 85-87). These panels and other objects in wood displayed here show adequately how wood had been exploited for creating designs of extremely varied appeal. Wood is still used for various purposes though the choice of designs has undergone considerable change. But it may not be quite impossible even at the present state of our society to study and understand the inner possibilities of the material and take up the spirit retained through many centuries in order to evolve designs suited to the present conditions.

As certain inherent qualities of wood have been utilised by craftsman for evolving characteristic designs, the qualities inherent in metal had given rise to certain peculiarity in objects made of metal. Different metals such as gold, silver, copper etc. as well as alloys like bronze and bell metal have been used in India from a very early time. The earliest metal figure found from Bengal was an image of the Buddhist Goddess *Sarvani* referred

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to above. This figure revealed that the technique of ciré perdue or lost wax casting was already in a very advanced state of development in Bengal during the 7th century. A.D. Quite a number of images have since been recovered from many places of Bengal. It is reported that some of these were in gold; a *Vishnu* image made of silver is still to be seen in the collections of the Indian Museum. The rest are made of an alloy of eight metals (*asta dhatu*), considered auspicious in making of images. These images are comparatively restricted in size and can be easily carried in procession as representatives of the *achala* or immovable varieties of the *Vigrahas* or images installed in temples. In metal it is possible to get sharp and precise rendering of the physical form as well as to realise abstraction of the forms in various ways. The pre-*Pala* and *Pala* images are from this point of view more naturalistic and closer to sculpture in stone. But gradually abstract forms rendering the images more decorative emerge during the mediæval period. These metal figures thus cease to have the sculptural qualities that were to be found in the *Pala* images in metal, though the tendency to turn more decorative was already in the offing.

From metal to stone it was not a very far cry though stone has been the most significant material used for making sculpture. It has always been a dream on the part of man to rival the creation of nature by producing the three dimensional form. He has not been satisfied by realising the human form but had extended his creative abilities to turn out something that even nature had not been able to do. He had created the form of the superman and enjoyed being the creator of what he himself intended to be. In sculpture man has always wanted to be monumental and the stigma of being grossly absurd would not prevent him from projecting his imagination. The Buddha figures of Mathura, the colossal Buddha of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, the monumental image of Gomatesvara at Sravana Belgola adequately bear out the propensities of the artist's mind. In Bengal, however, the artist worked with moderation. The supply of black basalt from Rajmahal hills had become plentiful from the time of the establishment of the *Pala* rule and sculpture obtained a definite course to follow. This stone, comparatively less hard when just quarried, became extremely concentrated and metallic afterwards. The sculpture produced in this stone had the grace and serenity of an absorbing nature. Mostly these sculptures represent figures of divinities, Brahmanical, Buddhist or Jain. The male deities are mostly represented frontally in the *Samabhanga* pose with emphasis on the verticality; their bodies contained in sharp metallic outline and offering soft and smooth surface are shown with transparent cloth worn as *Uttariya* and *Dhuti*.

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The only element shown on the figures to obviate the nature of the images and distract the view of the onlooker had been the ornaments cut deeply upon the body as if to imitate the work of the jeweller. If the repetition of the vertical form of the principal figures shown on the stela could be hardly encouraging for the seeker of design, often the individual physiognomical parts, the ornaments, the coiffure, the side figures as well as the very rich ornamental details carved upon the back slabs provided widely expanding design characteristics of considerable value. An extremely sensitive head illustrated here, having a striking hairdo, found from a place called Agradiguni in Dinajpur district, has a distinctive charm of its own and is probably one of the very few traditional sculptures found to bear an intimate personalised touch (fig. 90). While looking for the impressive and monumental character of the sculpture the stone carver in Bengal was not averse to the decorative aspect of the images. The images of the gods belonging to late *Pala* and early *Sena* age are typically characterised by this decorative aspect gradually growing more impressive in the long run to swamp the main element of representation. The figures of the divinities were almost submerged by ornaments of various kinds.

Of course, before becoming completely baroque and overburdened with lifeless swarm of ornaments, the *Pala* sculpture had for some time flourished in a splendid environment of ornaments which created a highly sensitive yet, not too obstrusive world of its own, full of the significance inherent in the decorative scheme. The two side figures often shown in the *tribhanga* pose are made in the scheme of decoration that lends effective support to the frame around with the gargoyle shaped *Kirtimukha* having a long triangular tongue at the apex, the garland bearing *Gandharvas* and bird-tailed *Kinnaras* on either side, the *Gajashimha* enclosing the frame and the mount and donners upon the pedestal (*Vishnu* image, fig. 91). Elsewhere *Vishnupattas*, circular *chakras* or door jambs with boldly carved figures made in black basalt bring out the design consciousness of the sculptors who evinced great delight in bringing out not only the divine element in the images but the worldly aspect of their ornamental and schematic ramifications which in most cases created highly pleasing effect as masterpieces of design (figs. 88-89).

The design sense as has been said was thus gradually on the increase. The sculptures of the early period were more contained in themselves and offered limited scope for ornamentation. But gradually in the late *Pala* period ornamental decoration of the slabs upon which the main figures were carved in very high relief began to accommodate additional human forms and other elements as decoration. But the tendency, though kept

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within reasonable bounds for some time could not be prevented from creating an over-burdening effect upon the sculptures almost squeezing the life out of the main items of representation, the image of the god itself. This tendency shows how excessive preference for ornamental details can ruin the design character of art and render it completely lifeless and ineffective in its appeal.

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CHAPTER SIX

Like the groups of temple builders settled in Birbhum, there have also been settlements of painters to be found at many odd places of Bengal. These painters, commonly known as the *Patuas* have been compelled to leave their hereditary occupation and are scarcely found to carry on their old trade. The *Patuas* of Birbhum were mostly Muslims, but they had Hindu names and traced their origin in Hindu mythology. The *Patuas* of Bankura and Midnapore hailed from the *Sutradhar* (carpenter) caste. Elsewhere the potters and the image-makers belonging to the *Kumbhakara* caste also did some painting.

The tradition of painting in India goes back to a very early age. Vedic and Buddhist literatures bear many information about the existence of painting in India during early periods of history. In Bengal, a copper plate found from the Sundarbans and dated in the year 1198 A.D. bears an interesting drawing executed in sharp incised lines, showing a figure of *Vishnu* seated with *Garuda* kneeling before him with folded hands (now in the Asutosh Museum). This drawing is strongly in the tradition of a contemporary art of painting and presupposes the paintings found in Buddhist manuscripts of the *Pala* age. These manuscripts mostly traced from Nepal and Tibet and now preserved in several museums in India and abroad have adequately testified to the existence of a well-developed school of painting in Bengal during pre-Muslim days. Chiefly illustrative of *Mahayana Tantric* deities, the miniatures in these manuscripts are extremely delicate in their delineation of lines and the use of colours and are traced to have all the fundamental characteristics of the basic Indian tradition met with in the paintings at Ajanta.

The passage of time had considerably affected the development of painting in the country giving rise to various idioms on regional basis. The classical tradition still actively pursued in the manuscript illuminations had lost its vitality and patronage in the wake of the political upheaval witnessed in the country during the 11th century A.D. Only a folk tradition heavily backed by a popular patronage could survive. Though somewhat different in character and treatment the paintings belonging to this popular tradition had for long provided cultural food and sustenance to large masses of people of this part of the country.

The paintings belonging to this tradition have been known in several

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varieties and can be classified according to their size and use. The most widely distributed varieties of such painting are found in the form of scrolls known in Bengali as the *jarano pats*. Such scrolls could be usually 12 to 16 feet in length and 2-3 feet in width, and were carried by the painters known as the *Patuas* to be shown before gatherings of village folks in accompaniment with music. This music was also composed by the *Patuas* themselves. Such scroll *pats* have been recovered in large numbers from different parts of Bengal. Apart from these *pats*, paintings are also found in manuscripts and the paintings in these manuscripts cover an unusually varied range of subjects. A *Tulsidasi Ramayana* manuscript containing folios of rich illustration was some time ago found from Murshidabad. Written for a lady of the Mahisadal (Midnapore) Raj family and now preserved in the Asutosh Museum, these illustrated folios of the *Ramayana* are eloquent evidence of the existence of a rich tradition of book illustration in Bengal. From Bankura and its neighbourhood has been known a type of painting usually done on pieces of paper a foot or a little more in length and 6 to 8 inches wide. Such paintings are known as the *Chakshudana* (eye giving) *pats* and were used for magical purpose. The latest of these traditions was to be found at Kalighat and flourished during the 18th and 19th centuries, within the very limits of the city of Calcutta.

The tradition of scroll paintings can be traced in history from the Buddhist literature and influence of this variety can readily be detected on the sculptured panels of the stupa balustrades of pre-Christian era found from Bharhut and Sanchi and from Mathura and Amaravati and of the Gupta Age. A well-known author of Sanskrit drama, Vishakhadatta in his *Mudrarakshasa* first uses the word *jamapattika* in order to indicate a painter-ministrel who used to display his paintings to common audiences. The paintings shown by these *patuas* appear to have been almost similar to the scroll-*pats* of recent age. The *jarano pats* incidentally are also sometimes known as *jamapats* consequent to the appearance of scenes of future existence of persons in the other world ruled by *Yama* in these paintings.

The scroll paintings are significant for their story telling character. The themes of such paintings were often taken from well-known popular stories like *Krishnalila*, *Ramayana*, *Behula Kahini* etc. and these stories at once gripped the mind of the audience because of the peculiar treatment of the story represented in rectangular panels arranged in successive compartments. Indian art had from an early stage a strong story telling aptitude and the Bengal *pats* like the picture of the *Chitrakathis* of Maharastra preserve this tradition in a very effective manner. Unlike the paintings of the Buddhist manuscripts the *pats* are flat in treatment but their language

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is best understood in the vigorous and sweeping outlines and intensely warm colour.

Some of the *pats* which may be the earliest among those to be found at present in the collections of different museums are found to bear strong influence of Rajasthani paintings of the 18th century in dress, ornaments, trees, flowers as well as in the architectural settings. Such influence of Rajasthani paintings particularly of the Jaipur school can also be met with in some 18th century book covers as well. A remote echo of the Mughal idiom can also be traced in some *pats* from Bankura of about the same age.

Though turned Muslims the *Patuas* of Birbhum retain a heritage derived from a very strong tradition and draw their artistic inspiration mainly from Hindu mythology and local folk-lore. The battle scenes of the *Ramayana* and Child *Krishna's* triumphs over the emissaries of *Kamsa*, selected as subject matter of many of their paintings, were probably effective as symbols of resistance which the society wanted to generate within itself against various types of oppressions. The stories of *Behula* and *Lakshindar* and *Srimanta* the merchant had also acquired great popularity among the common folks while the story of *Chaitanya* was also painted with avidity. The general way of representation in these paintings followed more or less a similar scheme. The surface of the long scrolls are distributed in rectangular compartments arranged vertically; these compartments are treated in order of the subject matter organised in successive scenes represented by the display of human figures, trees and architectural settings in a compact and integrated manner, with emphasis upon the narrative character of the compositions. In some of the panels, especially at the top, where the story starts, monumental figures are drawn in order to emphasise some particular aspect of the story. Otherwise the figures are often shown frontally or the faces are shown in profile with the rest of the body in three-quarter view. Once the ground was prepared upon joined up pieces of paper fixed upon cloth lining, the figures were drawn with bold sweeps intended to mark a sharp outline later to be filled in with different colours. The colours generally used were red, blue and yellow with occasional dash of green, white, pink and ochre of different shades. Black was used for the construction of lines and the flat background was often filled with a flat red colour of subtle intensity. The colours may be considered a little loud apparently because the *pats* were meant to be displayed under natural light for folk entertainment. Structurally, the scenes are found filled with animated movement and ingenious draftsmanship and though the figures are displayed flat or two dimensional against an empty space the sweeping lines and the variations of colour in the smart rolling up of the scrolls

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certainly created an amount of dramatic animation and tell-tale fluidity of action. Taken individually, the panels are found full of many distinctive characteristics and the compositional aspect of the scenes and the accessories such as the trees, the ornamental *Kalasas* or vases, the architectural settings are all full of many possibilities that can be readily exploited for designs of various kinds.

Closely allied to the art of the *Patua* was the painted *chalachitra* which adorned the upper part of the images of *Durga* made for worship in Bengal. The *chalachitras* are semicircular in shape, a broad area within which is found usually constituted into a continuous panel divided into two parts by a monumental figure of *Siva* seated at the top centre. Architectural settings around indicate the abode of *Siva* in *Kailasa* and on both sides of this setting are to be found highly animated scenes of battle between *Devi* in the form of *Kali* and her retinue on the one side and the *asuras* on the other. This painted arch-shaped design of the *chalachitra* may easily remind one of the semicircular architraves wrought with carvings found from the *Stupas* at Sanchi near Bhopal in Madhya Bharat. The highly shaded figures of *Siva* and the sweeping black outline of the dramatically poised combatant figures of the *chalachitras* bear close similarity to the *pata* style of painting and was definitely a popular offshoot of the same idiom.

Another significant style of painting is to be met with in the book illustrations as the chief area of expression. The earliest examples of book illustration as has been referred to above are known from the Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal, and Tibet and are now preserved in the collections of the Asiatic Society, and Asutosh Museum in Calcutta, British Museum, London, and such other places. Some of these paintings found on the wooden covers called the *pata* as well as the palm leaf or paper folios inside are considered examples of very high attainment in the field of miniature paintings ever done in this country. The subjects in these paintings were drawn from the life of Buddha, and also the form and character of the numerous *Bodhisattvas*, the *Taras*, the *Pancharakshas*, the *Astasiddhis* and such other divinities of the *Tantric* pantheon. The composition and movement in the presentation of the rounded forms of the figures, contained within flowing yet precise lines in these miniatures show extremely subtle delineation of colours enclosed within delicate lines. Colours used are red, yellow and blue with occasional variation of green etc. The manuscripts of recent times carry the same tradition though the style had undergone some fundamental changes.

Books for long were written on palm leaves or birch leaves and covered with two pieces of flat wood cut according to size. These wooden

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manuscript covers are known as *patas*. An early manuscript dated in 1105 A.D. and written on paper during the reign of king *Sihadeva* of Nepal and now in the collection of the Asutosh Museum records an early use of paper in India. Paper had gradually gained in popularity in Bengal and for most of the illustrated manuscripts paper seems to have been preferred to palm leaf.

The most remarkable illuminated paper manuscript so far known from any part of Bengal is a copy of *Tulsidasi Ramayana* which was written by a Brahmin from Prayag. It took three years from 1772 A.D. to complete. Though written in the *Devanagari* script, the painting done on the folios were undoubtedly executed by painters well versed in a tradition which had its habitat in Bengal. The writing though attributed to one person shows the work of several different hands towards the closing part of the book. Similarly, the paintings also reveal the work of more than one hand.

Usually, the paintings are found contained in square or rectangular frames formed of broad or thin lines filled with colours. Within the frames thus created the space is filled with figures which constitute the principal factor in the scheme of representation. The figures are clad in characteristic costumes, jewellery and *Dhuti* worn short or long or long loose robes for the males and *Sari* for women in profiles while the calligraphic script adds a certain rhythm in the scheme of ornamentation. Trees, flowers and architectural settings with furniture provide the relief in the composition overcharged with the endless procession of scenes unfolding the story in a sequence of intense animation (figs. 92-96).

The chief interest of the paintings rests in the physiognomical rendering of the figures, the structural composition of the panels and extremely suggestive rendering of the colours used. The variety of the physical forms depicted in these paintings cannot but evoke an interest of absorbing nature. In treatment these forms have close affinity to figures met with in contemporary paintings of Orissa but the structures of the figures here appear more well-thought-out and compact suggestive of a strength and self-reliance of their own. As a rule the figures are shown in profile but the artist was not incapable of wielding his figure in any required bent producing supple and graceful forms carrying deep emotional character. The faces are sharply edged on top by means of a bold curve of the hair while another curved line forming the eyebrows bends in an angle forming the tip of the nose. Within this frame of the face the bird like eyes give an effect of persistent restlessness and agitation, carried further by the wavy bends of the *sari* brought from above the head and hanging loosely upon the back of

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the figures while the other end of the cloth bends and folds in many sharp edging lines. Apart from the structure of the human form the artist laid emphasis on the composition in a deliberate way in order to produce a design of strongly effective and purposeful nature. Take for instance the panel in fig. 92 where three female figures are shown, within a twin arched balcony. The figure on the left with a child in her lap sits facing two other figures on the right. The central figure with yellow body colours holding her left hand diagonally across her body marks the equipoise of the whole structure balanced on either side as if two lines intersect each other diagonally at the centre of the panel indicating the cross purpose of the representation. Far removed from this but effective to the extreme is the panel showing the bird *Jatayu* trying to prevent the ten-headed demon *Ravana* carrying away *Sita*. While the two flowering trees on two sides provide a somewhat decorative frame in keeping with the highly ornate plumage of the gigantic bird, the enormous power in his body is indicated by the sharp bent of the tail and the position of the two legs (fig. 93). In the next panel is found representation of the well-known episode of bringing the river *Ganga* down to earth by *Bhagirath*. The panel shows a wheeled chariot with flying flags and drawn by two horses of two different colours, while the river is shown in downward flow of wavy bands of black, blue and pink colours with a ribbon of red edged with black that connects this tectonically with the chariot portion of the panel combining the effect of descent and onward progress in a highly effective manner (fig. 94).

The two other panels reproduced here also bring out the extremely effective nature of the painting offered as a medium of story telling in a direct and forthright manner, at the same time fully exploiting the compositional characters for creating the most pleasing and harmonious play of colour and form. These paintings have been acclaimed by one competent authority as forerunners of the indigenous *pat* style of Bengal. Strikingly enough an actual scroll illustrated by Mr. W. G. Archer (Archer-*Bazar painting*—Pl. 45) bears enough testimony to the fact that a particular style of *pat* painting was not far removed from these illuminations. It may not be unreasonable to believe that the painting wrongly identified by Mr. Archer as combat of *Hanuman* was actually the work of the same artist who had illustrated the *Ramayana* figured in these pages. In three successive panels of the scroll illustrated by Mr. Archer the uppermost one shows *Hanuman* conveying the message of *Jatayu* to *Ramachandra* bemoaning the loss of *Sita* and the last rites of *Jatayu*; the next panel shows the piercing of the seven palm trees and the last scene shows the death of *Bali*. The figures of men, women and apes, the treat-

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ment of trees, architectural settings and the clouds bear striking affinities to the elements met with in the manuscript from Mahisadal. Apparently, there was no difference between contemporary book illustration and the *pat* style in a particular region and one could easily be transposed into the other without much noticeable change or alteration.

This same probably holds good for the manuscript covers traced mostly from Bankura, revealing a parallel development in the art of painting. These covers popularly known as *patas* are also representational and illustrative in nature, the subject matters being drawn from the contents of the story dealt with in the manuscripts inside.

To this *pat* tradition also belong the *Chakshudan* paintings found from Bankura and neighbouring region and also among the *Santhals* of the same area. The origin of the *Chakshudan pats* is probably to be traced among the tribal *Santhals* because the basis of such painting belong to primitive belief in magic. Usually, after the death of some person, a painter executes a portrait of the deceased without the pupils of the eyes shown in the painting. He next approaches the near ones of the deceased and tells them how badly the dead was faring in the other world without his eyes. At his behest the relatives pay him the necessary fees and the painters add the pupils to the portrait and the relatives feel satisfied that they had done a service to their loved one who is dead. The portraits are excellent in their highly characteristic representation executed in flat wash of colours. The same three basic colours red, blue and yellow were used with burnt sienna which was to indicate that these portraits belonged to those who were no longer alive.

In India no object of art, not to speak of the paintings of Kalighat style, ever so much was produced at any time just for sale in a common market. The pilgrim centre at Kalighat existed from before the eighteenth century like many other such pilgrim centres where the local shops were selling figures as well as paintings of the tutelary goddess *Kali* along with those of other popular divinities as mementos to the pilgrims coming from far and near. The *Patuas* catering to this need were just professional painters who derived their inspiration from the great heritage of tradition and as elsewhere his own social environments as well as the patronage he had received could to an extent, condition the work he had produced. Delineation of social subjects was not unknown to the traditional artists of the country as would be evident from temple plaques the basic cartoons for which had evolved from many socially interpretable scenes of *Krishnalila*, *Chandi* and *Manasamangal* paintings. The sources, and the background are quite clear. Interesting, however, is the account of progress and decline of this

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arresting phase of Indian Painting during the course of the two hundred years since early eighteenth century.

The last of the *Patuas* of Kalighat ceased to operate some time about 1930 after withstanding many vicissitudes : the advent of the cheap oleographs from Germany, enormous rise in the cost of living and lack of interest in the traditional components of culture in the town. The lure of oleographs had hurled the last blow to the work of the *Patuas* catering to the pilgrim centres and had knocked out the traditional *yama pats* and the divine figures which were sold at pilgrim centres of Kalighat, Tarakeswar, Nabadwip and the like. So long, undoubtedly the representation of the goddess peculiar to the temple here, more abstract with make-shift crown, tongue and arms was the main object of attraction. Since the sale of the representation of the goddess was badly affected by the German imports of base imitation, the ingenious artist had to look for other saleable motifs and adjust those to the taste and requirement of his customers. It was a great uphill task and there was a chain of shifting readjustments. In and around the basic structure of the cartoons had to be accommodated numerous extraneous traits which however could not functionally alter the main idiom but canalised it along a course which could no longer be identified with the earlier course. The chief characteristic deviations are met with in the effort of producing a three dimensional effect with the help of shading and evolving naturalistic traits in the physiognomy with arrangement of hair, moustache, ornaments and folds of drapery. The outlines of the physiognomical structure was however all through drawn in extraordinarily bold weeping lines. The more the artist deviated in the subject matter and shading and other extraneous trends the more they clung to the purity and attraction of the linear composition which held the frame of the works spontaneous and charming till the day of extinction. In spite of the heroic efforts of the artists the inevitable doom could not be averted for long and the last of the lamps was extinguished some time about 1930.

A close parallel of the Kalighat prototype is traced here in the figure of *Kali* drawn against a white background with white lines filled with black colour. The four arms flung on four sides with the right foot placed on the breast of *Siva* prostrate on the ground produce an effect of suppressed agitation, concentrated within. A typical Kalighat though unfinished, represents a figure of *Kartikeya* riding on his peacock mount (figs. 98-99). The structural drawing shows pencil lines apparently drawn with the help of a stencil while the bold swinging lines were laid afterwards according to the requirements. The wash of colour was also put gradually filling the spaces indicated.

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The Kalighat paintings are excellent wares for the intending designer as he would find in these enough material for use. The painters in this school were masters of their lines, unerring, modulated and eloquent to the extreme. In these lines one would at once witness the vigour and precision of the lines met with in the paintings of Ajanta as well as the Sundarban copper plate of *Dommanapala*. The transition from the modelled quality of the lines of the Ajanta tradition to the two dimensional of the late mediæval age is not adequately preserved in existing documents. The lines persisted to ensure the continuity of the age-old trend. The school of Kalighat forced by circumstances had to widen the choice of subject; in changing grounds there was a shift towards new form of shading as well as the use of colours. In the basic qualities of the traditions contained in the *Pat*, the *Pata*, the scroll and the Kalighat paintings there are enough possibilities for designing. As has been proved in competent hands these can help in the creation of endless new forms and a fresh world of absorbing charm and vitality of enduring nature.

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1 Woven *Sari* in silk; Bishnupur, Bankura.
Close knit, lively red ground with broad *anchla* and narrow border; designs in yellow, black and white showing flower and plant motifs variegated with a row of abstract human figures at the end.
Late 19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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1

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2 Centre of a *Rumal;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Woven cotton textile, white body with gold thread;
large rosette at centre with diagonal stripes upon the body.
Late 19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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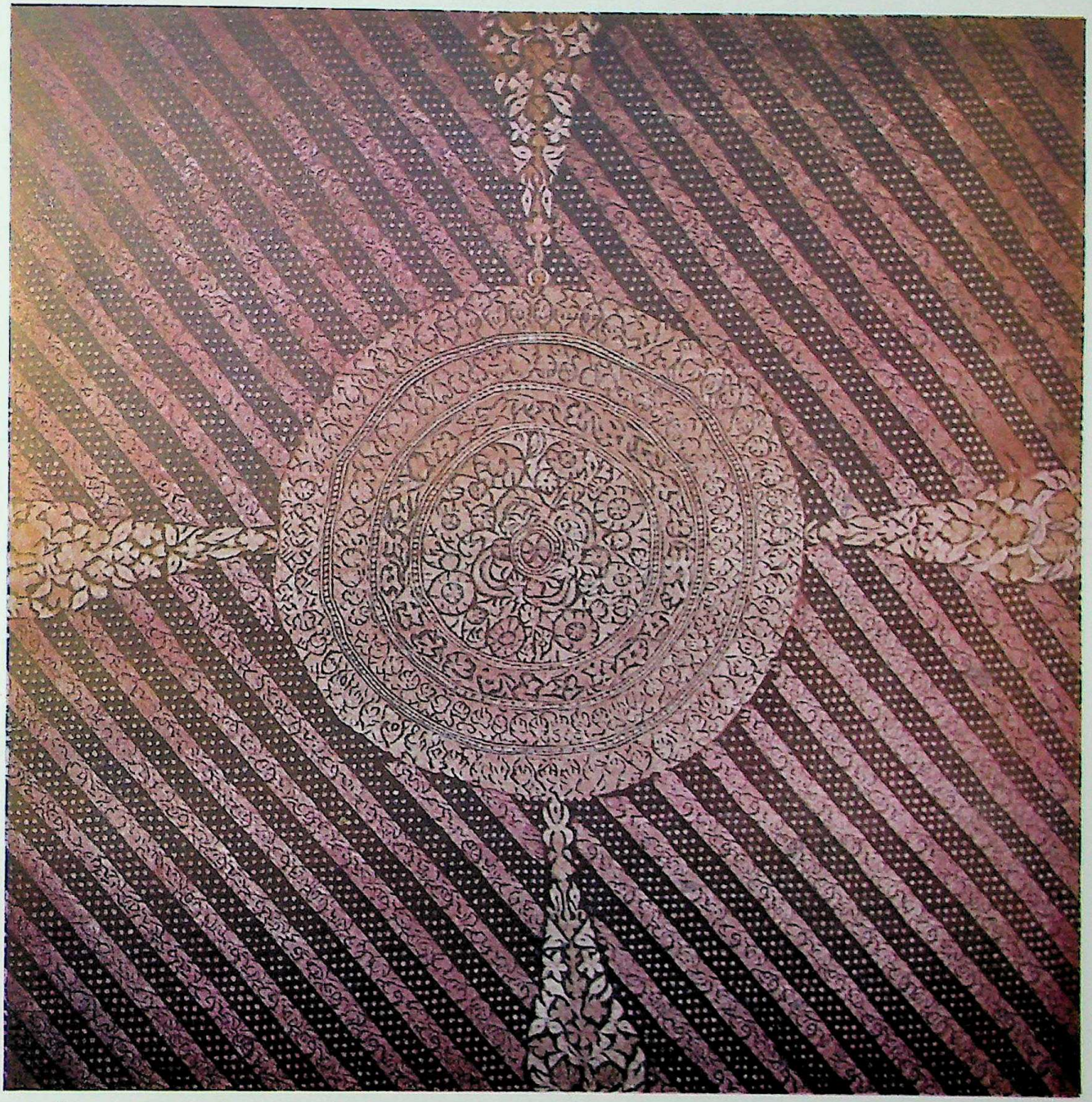

2

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3 Part of a *Phulkari Sari;* Rangpur, East Bengal.
Cotton textile, deep indigo ground embroidered with *kalka* and flower motifs in red, yellow and blue threads.
Late 19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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3

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4 Part of a *Nilambari;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Woven cotton textile with deep blue ground having floral and geometric designs embroidered in white thread.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum, Calcutta.

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4

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5 Corner of a *Rumal;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Woven cotton textile with white and ash ground,
kalka at corner and floral motifs on borders;
body with diagonal stripes.
Late 19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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6 Part of a *Jamdani Sari;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Woven cotton textile with indigo ground, crimson stripes on borders; designs in silk thread.
19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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7 Part of *Kasida Chadar;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Cotton textile with embroidery in *muga* thread.
Once a great favourite with Muslims in India and abroad.
19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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8 *Kasida rumal;* Dacca, East Bengal.
White cotton textile embroidered with blue and red *muga* threads.
Produced by Sri Krishnalal Basak.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection, Calcutta.

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8

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9 *Anchla* end of a *butidar sari;* Baluchar, Murshidabad. Woven silk with crimson ground filled with star motifs in red, white and green colours; elaborate *anchla* with *kalka*, floral motifs and human figures. 19th Century A.D. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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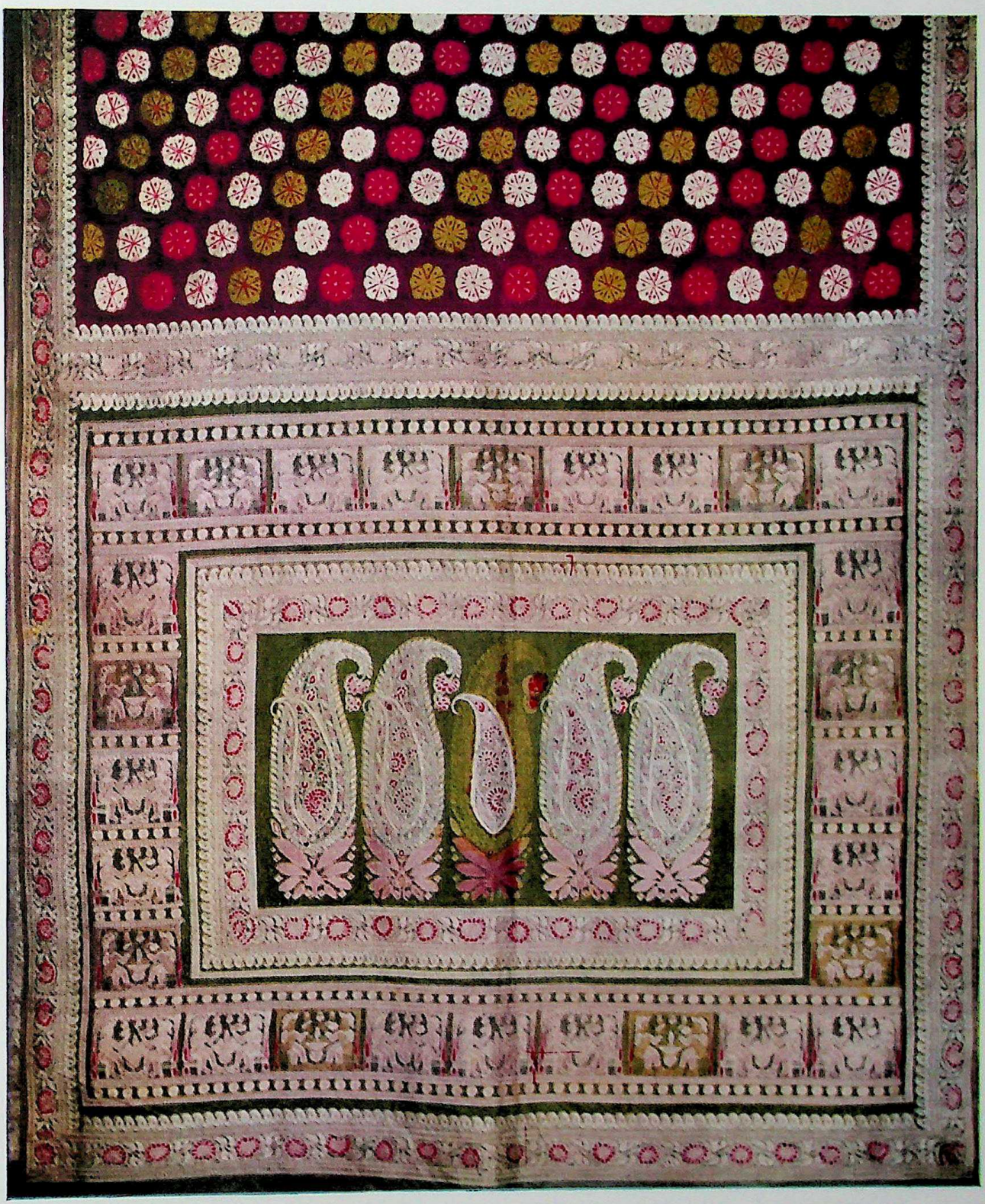

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10 Part of a silk *Sari*; Baluchar, Murshidabad.
Woven with thick crimson ground, yellow border and a motif showing an arched throne with a seated figure repeated in white, blue and yellow colours.
19th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta University.

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10

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11 Terracotta temple plaque; Jessore, East Bengal. Figure of *Rama* engaged in battle. The forceful figure of *Rama* set diagonally within the rectangular frame riding on a *Makara* chariot makes an exceedingly effective design material. 19th Century A.D. Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

12 Terracotta rosette; Jessore, East Bengal. 19th Century A.D. Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

13 '*Rama* bending *Siva's* bow'; Jessore, East Bengal. Temple plaque in Terracotta; the powerful bent of *Rama's* body hurled against the curve of the bow along with the graceful curve of the figure standing opposite him gives the composition a distinctive character. 19th Century A.D. Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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14 Ceremonial procession;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta plaque showing
man with shield and sword
followed by a horse and a dog;
above front portion of a chariot
carrying musicians.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

15 Architectural
ornament;
Jessore,
East Bengal.
Wavy tendril
decoration with
sprouting buds
carved on
terracotta tablet.
18th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

16 Boats;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple plaque;
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

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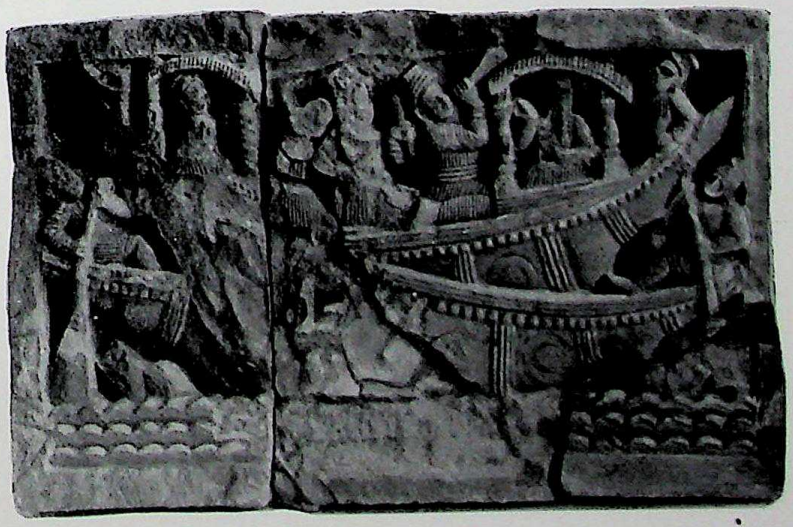

16

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17 'Fawns in flight';
Khulna, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple plaque showing a splendid scene in movement composed of highly animated deer fleeing from some unknown danger.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, Calcutta.

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19 Mendicants; Birbhum.
Terracotta temple plaque showing *Sadhus* with long matted hair standing under a pavilion and chanting rhymes.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

18 Temple terracotta with creeper design;
Jessore, East Bengal.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

21 *Bastraharan;*
Jessore,
East Bengal.
Terracotta panel showing *Krishna* playing on his flute seated upon a tree while two *Gopinis* imploring from below. Notice the beautiful pose of *Krishna* and the sensitive willowy curve of the tree.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

20 Temple plaque showing horses and part of a chariot;
Jessore, East Bengal.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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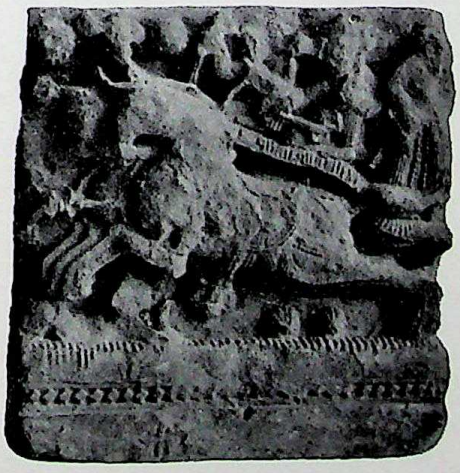

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22 Seated divine
flanked by two attendants;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple plaque.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

23 Dancers;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Two dancing female figures
with long flowing
garment; part of
terracotta plaque.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

24 '*Jagaddhatri*';
Jessore, East Bengal.
Four handed goddess
standing on a lion carved
upon a rectangular
terracotta temple plaque.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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25 Wavy tendril;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple
decoration.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

26 Terracotta
ornamental brick;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Wire-net decoration
with ornamental sprouts.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

27 Terracotta ornamental tile;
Jessore, East Bengal.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

28 Floating geese;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple decoration.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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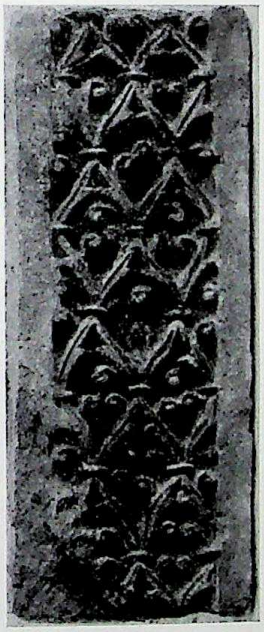

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29 Terracotta temple plaque;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Rosette with radiating
petals having pointed tips.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

30 *Yashoda* with *Krishna*;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple plaque.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

31 Architectural ornament;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta tiles showing extremely
ornate decoration.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

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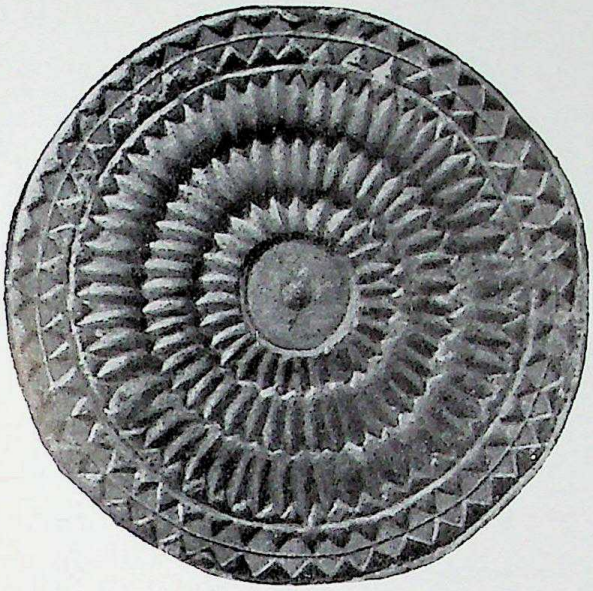

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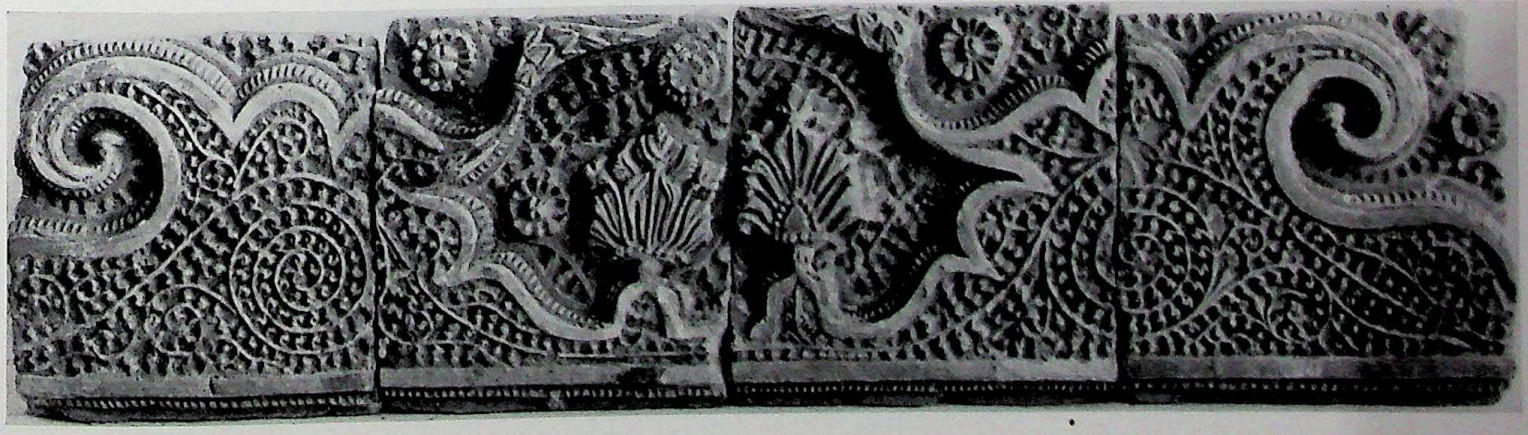

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32 Architectural decoration;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta temple ornament showing corner bond with animal and human forms juxtaposed in an ascending row.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

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33 Figure resting on a staff; Birbhum.
Terracotta temple plaque showing figure within an arched niche framed by rectangular loops. Probable figure of *Balarama*. Notice the broad shoulders and the swaying tribhanga pose of the body.
18th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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34 Terracotta temple plaque; Jessore, East Bengal.
Scene showing *Krishna's* departure for Mathura from Vrindavana. *Krishna* and *Balarama* upon *Makara* chariot with *Akrura* driving the car; *Gopinis* in remorse.
18th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

35 Temple decoration; Jessore, East Bengal.
Terracotta plaque showing *Yashoda* with pot in hand; *Krishna* and *Balarama* in front.
18th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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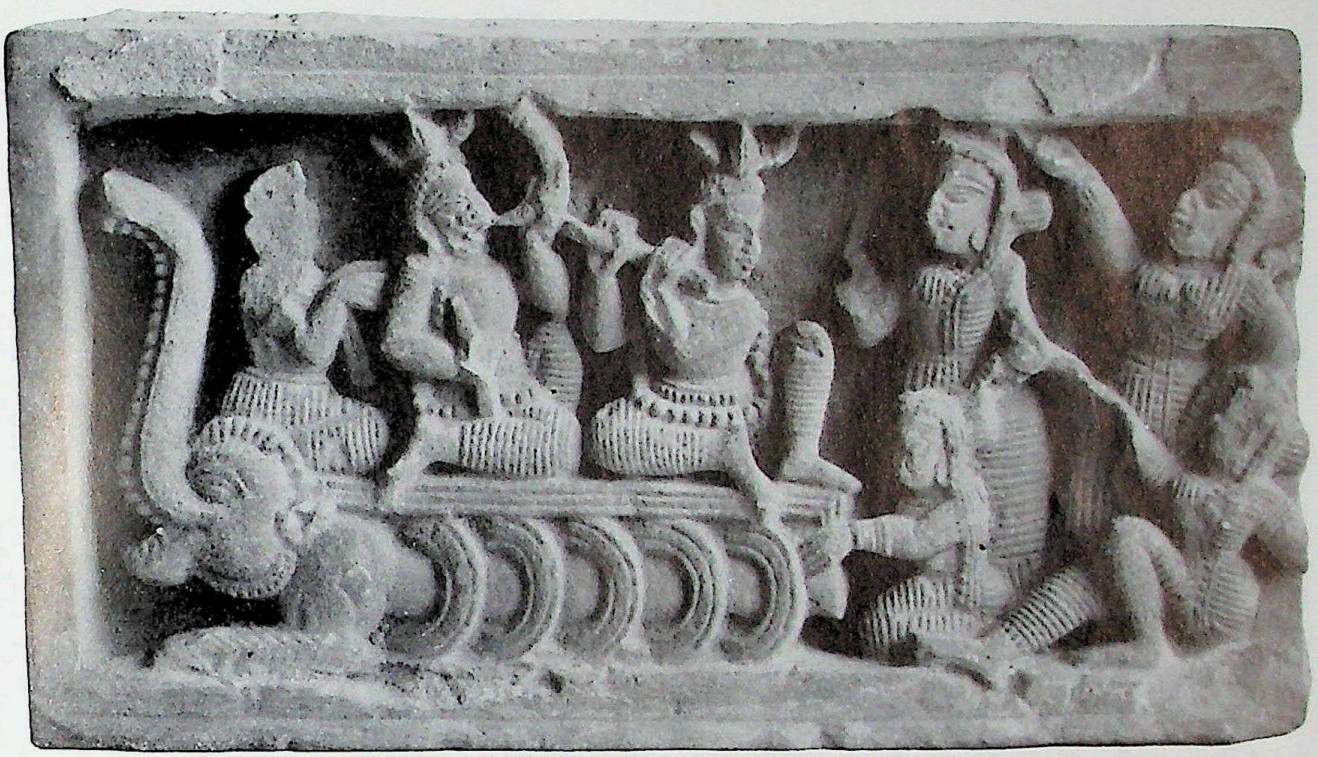

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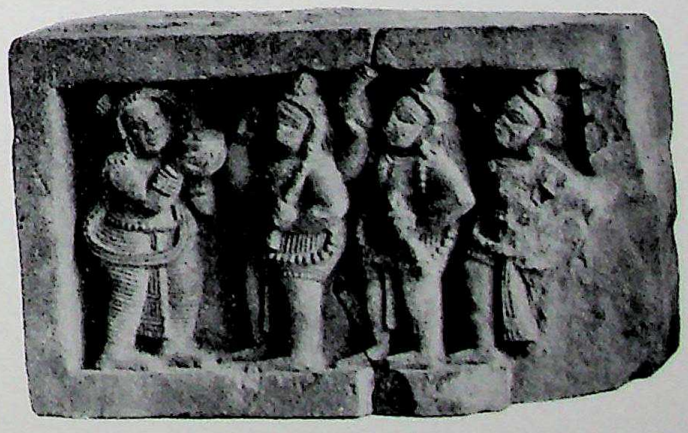

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36 Owl;

Natungram, Burdwan. Ritual doll in wood painted with yellow, red, black and blue colours. Notice the fan-shaped body standing on two solid column like legs. The highly abstract head has large eyes shown in concentric circles and pointed ears. An art work permeated with a thorough understanding of mass in relation to form. Colours lend the popular and the folk touch.

Modern.

Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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38 '*Duldul horse*';
Majilpur, 24 Parganas.
Soft doll filled with sawdust and ornamented with jute fibre and paper strips; used by the Muslims in connection with the Muharram festival.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

37 Terracotta horse;
Panchmora, Bankura. Wheel made pottery, burnt either red or black; ritual object used in connection with worship of *Manasa*, the snake goddess.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

39 Winged horse; East Bengal.
Wheeled wooden figure painted in red, black, yellow and blue colours.
Modern.
Craft Museum,
Indian Institute of Art in Industry,
Calcutta.

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40 Wooden dolls;
Natungram, Burdwan.
Figures of *Rama* and *Sita*,
Yashoda with child *Krishna*
and a woman; painted in red,
blue and yellow.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

41 Mother
with child;
Mymensing,
East Bengal.
Terracotta
toy.
Modern.
Gurusaday
Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

42 Lady with bowl;
Mymensing, East Bengal.
Terracotta toy
with red slip.
Modern.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

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44 Dove;
Burdwan.
Terracotta toy
painted with
red, black and
white colours.
Modern.
Gurusaday
Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

43 Painted
wooden doll;
Natungram,
Burdwan.
Vertical block
of wood made
into abstract
shape and
painted. Dress
and headgear
show Muslim
influence.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy
Collection,
Calcutta.

45 Wheeled elephant;
East Bengal. Wooden figure
painted with black, red
yellow, blue and
green colours.
Modern.
Craft Museum,
Indian Institute
of Art in Industry,
Calcutta

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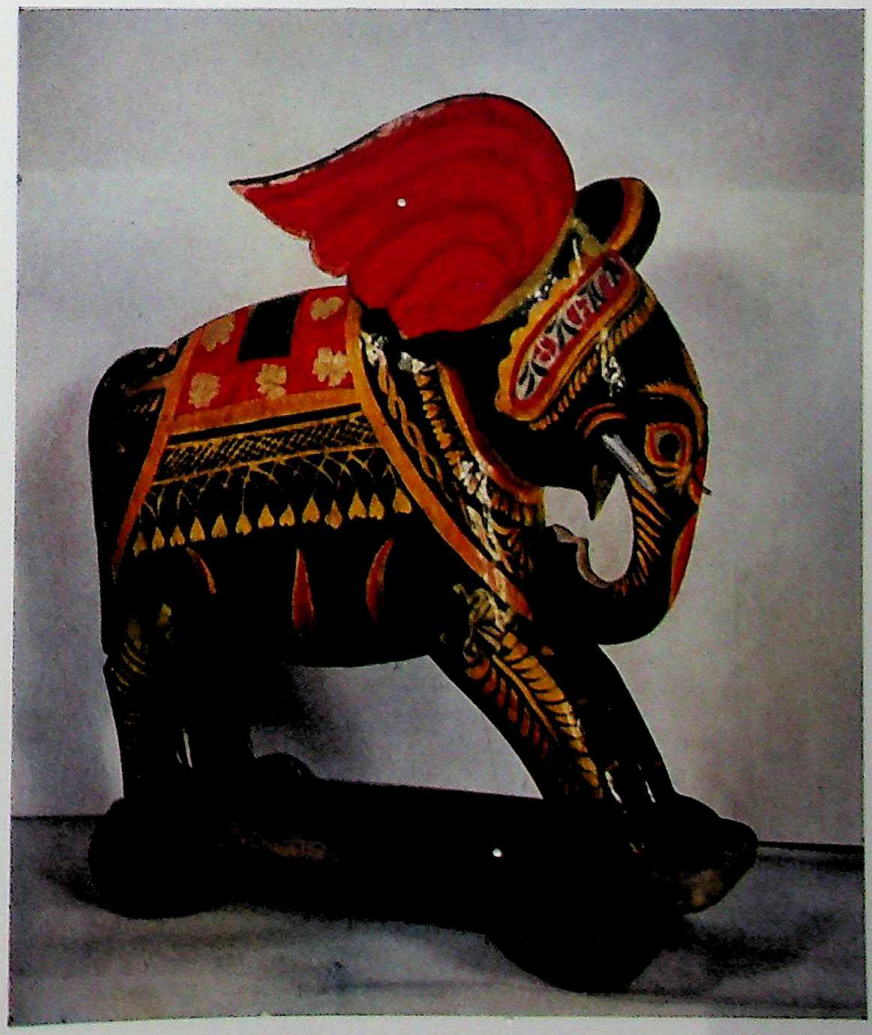

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46 Female bust;
Howrah.
Terracotta figure with beak-like nose and pierced circular pelleted eye.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

47 Wheeled horse;
East Bengal.
Terracotta votive toy.
Modern.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

CC-0. Agamnigam Digital Presevation Foundation, Chandigarh

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47

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48 *'Manasa Medh';*
Panchmora, Bankura. Ritual terracotta connected with the worship of the snake goddess *Manasa*. Hollow, wheel made and kiln burnt.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

49 Ritual dolls;
Narajole, Midnapore.
Burnt clay
painted with red, yellow, green, blue and black colours.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

50 *Krishna;*
Narajole, Midnapore.
Burnt clay
painted with blue, red, yellow and black colours.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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49

50

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51 *Alpana* designs;
Traditional ritual motifs usually done upon earth with rice paste.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

52 *Visvapadma;*
Alpana design showing the world lotus.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

53 Sun upon a tank;
Alpana design.
Modern
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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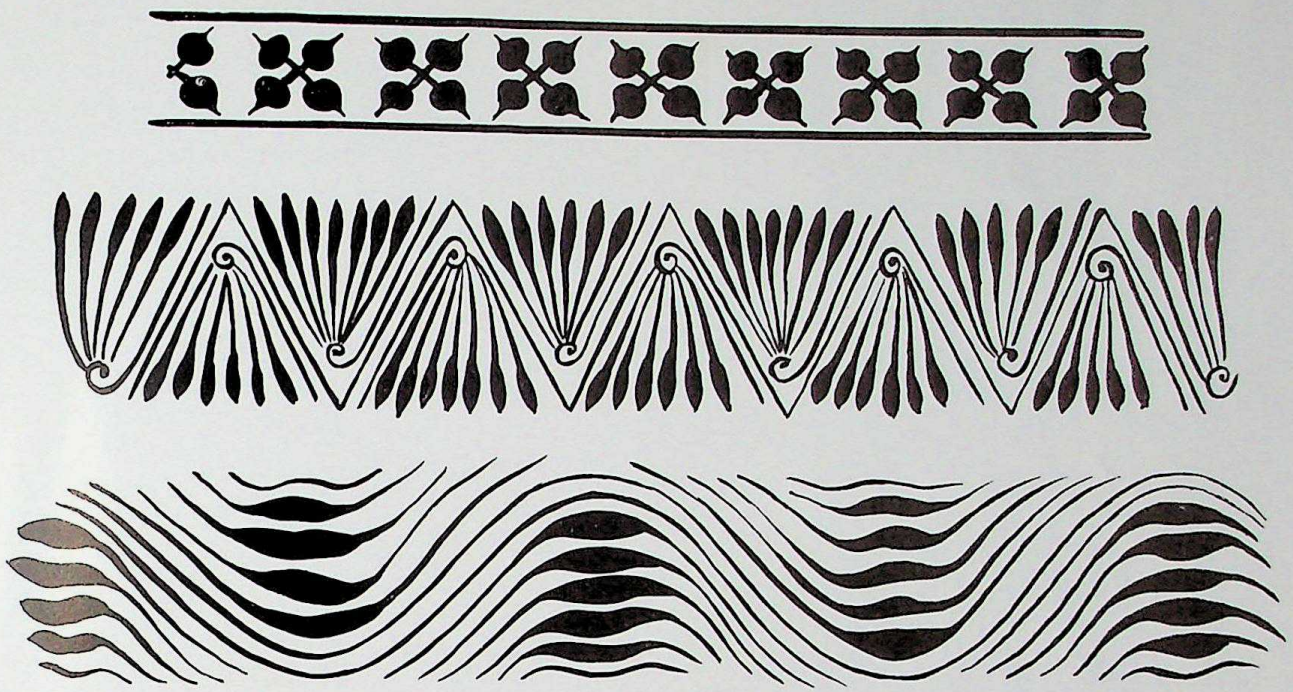

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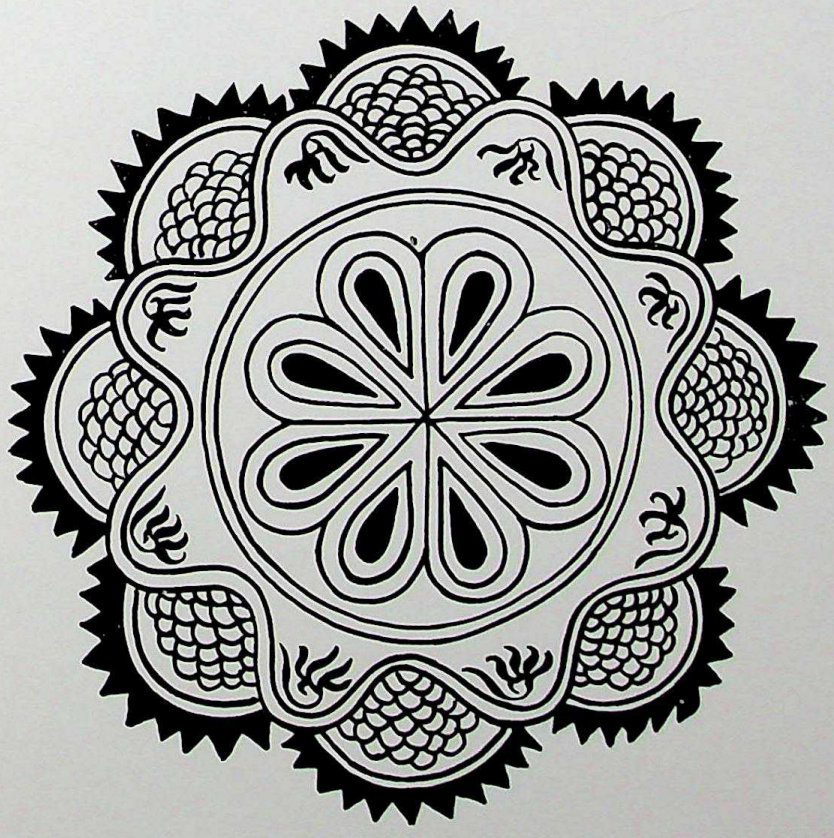

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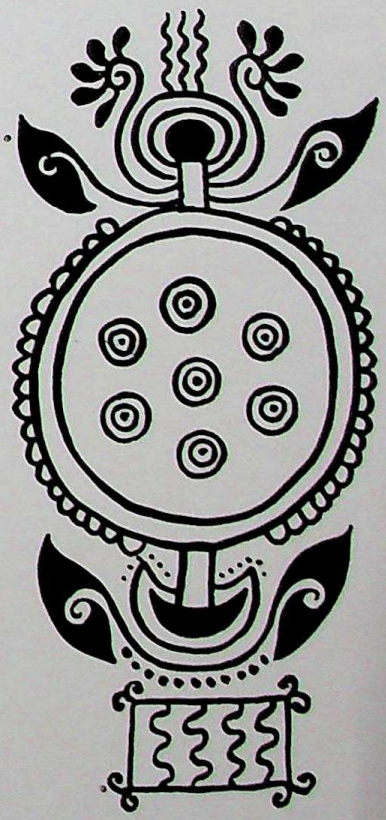

53

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54 Face of *Durga;*
Krishnagore, Nadia.
Mould made clay, painted; adorned with pith and tinsel ornaments.
Modern.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum, Calcutta.

55 *Dak Saj;*
Krishnagore, Nadia.
Part of costume of *Durga* image, made of pith and tinsel.
Modern.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum, Calcutta.

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54

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56 *Mangal Ghat;*
Rajnagar, Birbhum.
Ritual terracotta jar painted with fish, flower and other designs in red, green, blue and yellow colours. Used in connection with marriage ceremony.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum.
Calcutta.

57 *Kulo;*
Barisal, East Bengal.
Bamboo tray, normally used for purposes of winnowing cereals. Painted with designs in connection with marriage and other auspicious functions.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

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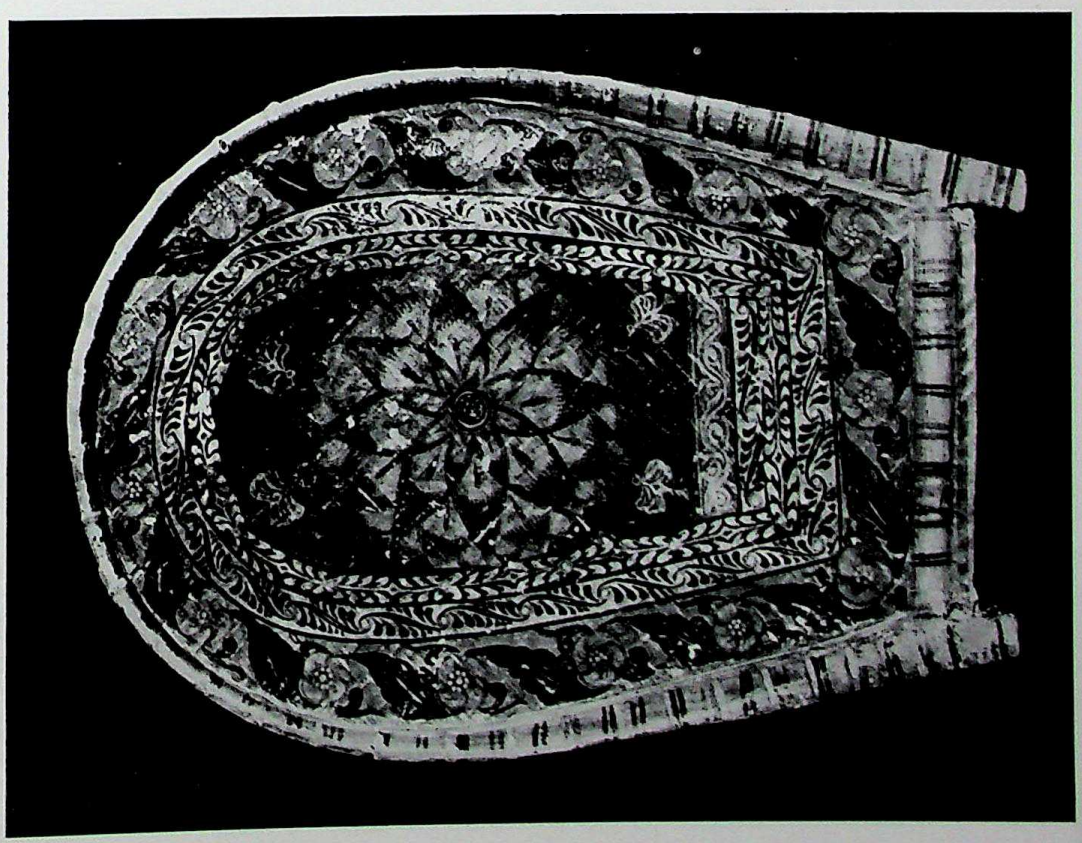

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58 *Dakshin Rai;*
Jaynagar, 24 Parganas.
Terracotta ritual mask
of the Tiger god *Dakshin Rai*
worshipped in the southern
regions of Bengal. Notice
the fan-shaped head dress
and the head formed of an
upturned wide mouthed
jar. Painted with red and
black colour upon white
ground.
Modern.
Craft Museum,
Indian Institute
of Art in Industry,
Calcutta.

59 *Durga Sara;*
Dacca, East Bengal.
Large terracotta
saucer with outer side painted in red, yellow,
blue and green colours.
Modern.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur,
24 Parganas.

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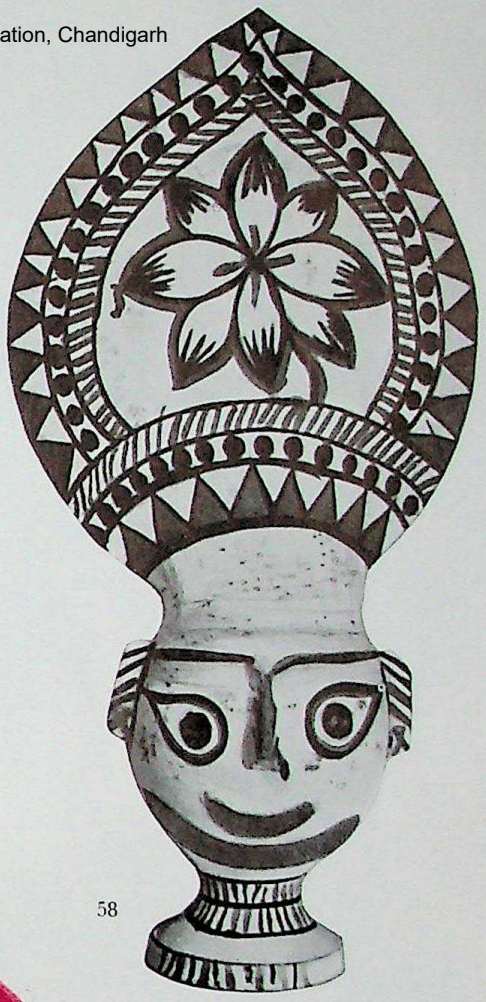

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60 Mask of *Kali;*
Goalpara, Assam.
Pith; painted with black, red and white colours.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

61 *Eo Sara;*
Barisal, East Bengal.
Painted terracotta jar with peacock-topped high, domical lid and encircled by row of tiny damsels; used in connection with marriage ceremony.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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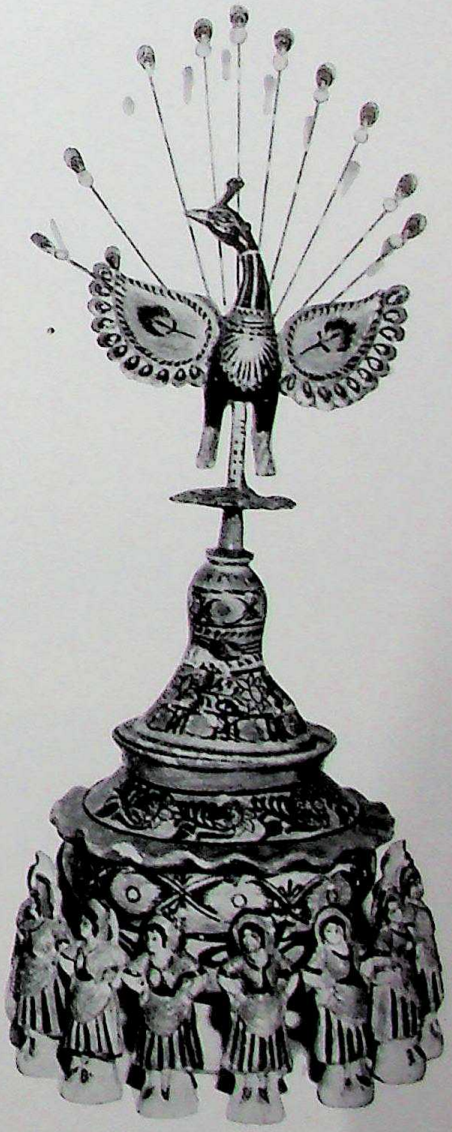

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62 Cards;
Bishnupur, Bankura.
Paper thickened with
glue and shellac and painted with
figures illustrating the ten incarnations of *Vishnu*.
Modern.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum,
Calcutta.

63 *Joth;*
Faridpur, East Bengal.
Woven with textile
threads secured from worn out cloth and
coloured black, red and white; used for hanging
household objects.
Modern.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

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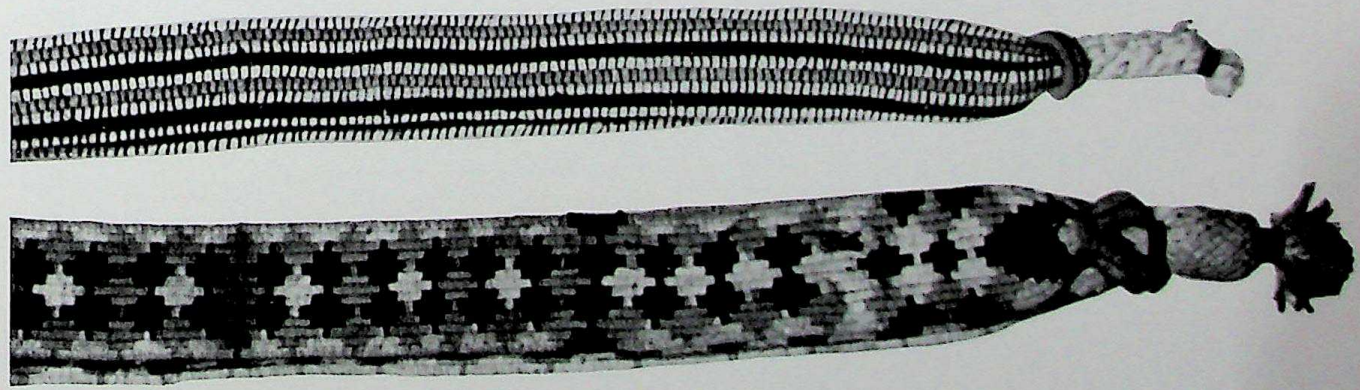
62



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64 *Sitalpati;*
Midnapore. Woven with *pati*-grass.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

65 *Mat;*
Maslandapur, Midnapore. Woven with reeds dyed in red and black colours.
Modern.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum,
Calcutta.

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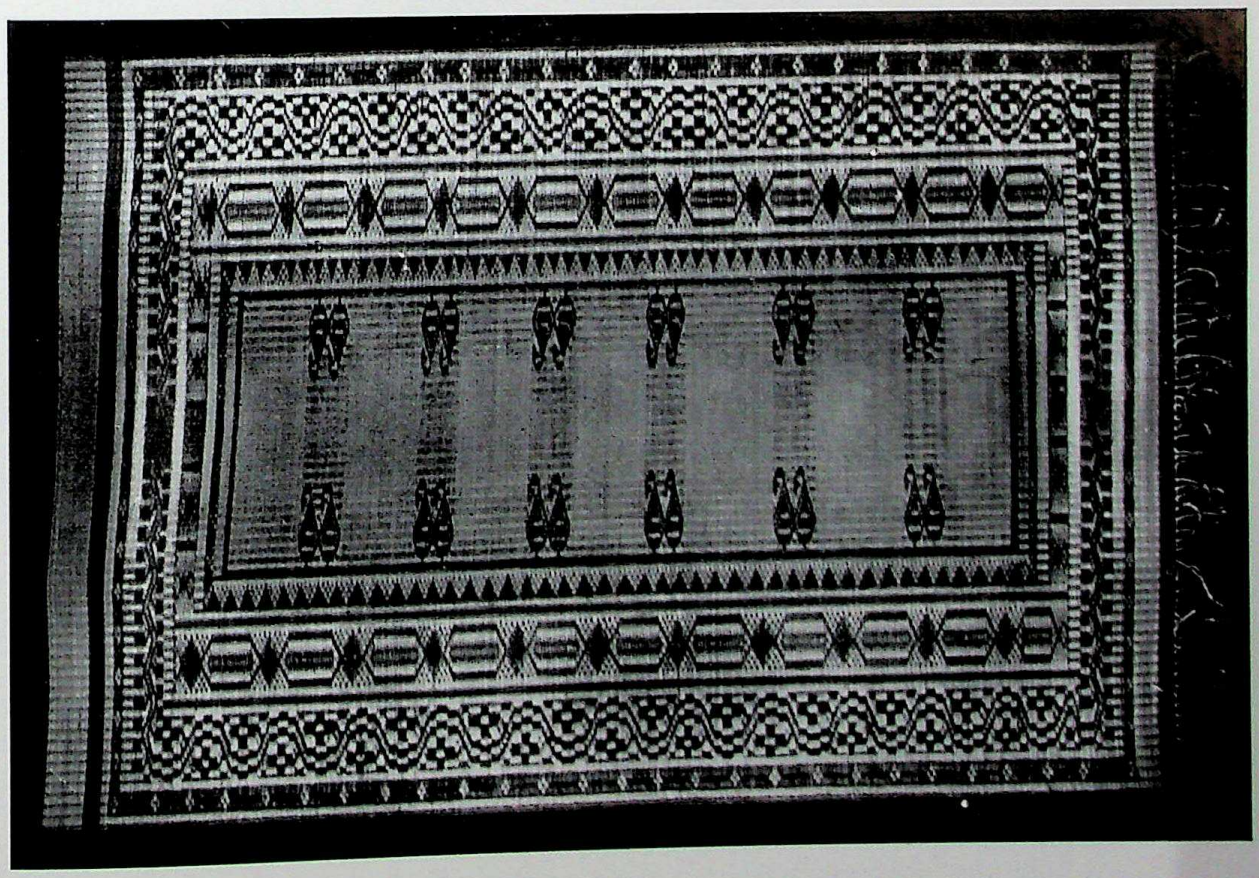
64



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66 *Mayurpankhi;*
Berhampore, Murshidabad.
Ivory boat with
built up pavilion; boat-men and
oars made separately.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Indian Museum,
Calcutta.

67 Part of a *Setar;* Calcutta.
String instrument having
bulb made of gourd and body
of wood; inlaid with ivory and appliqué
designs.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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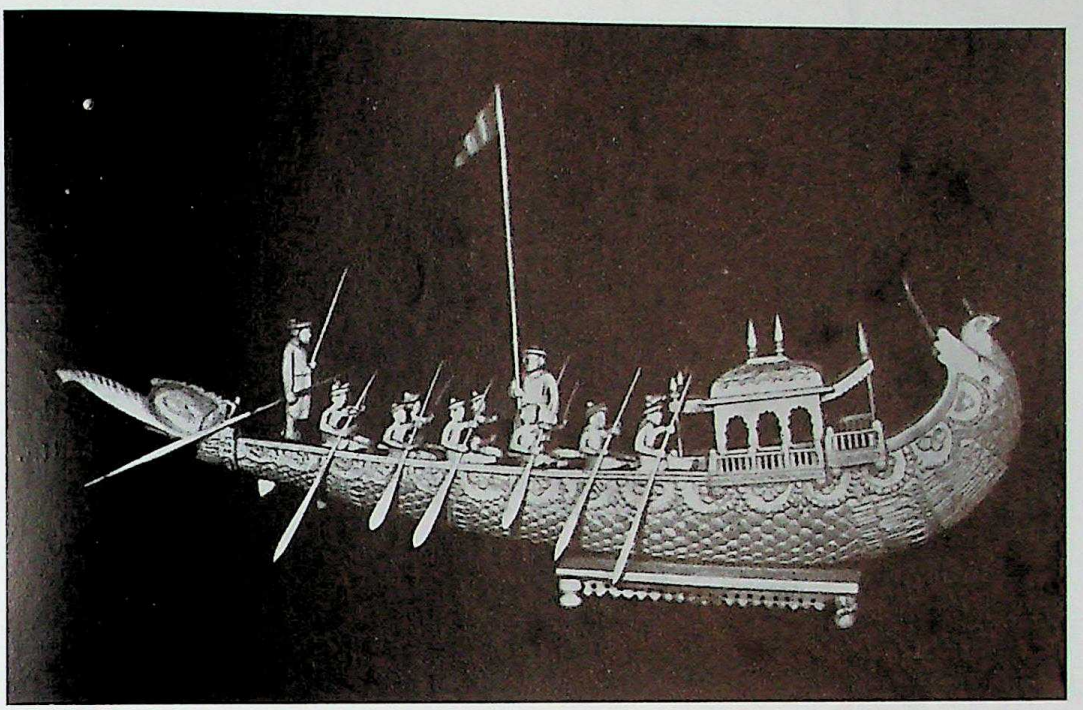

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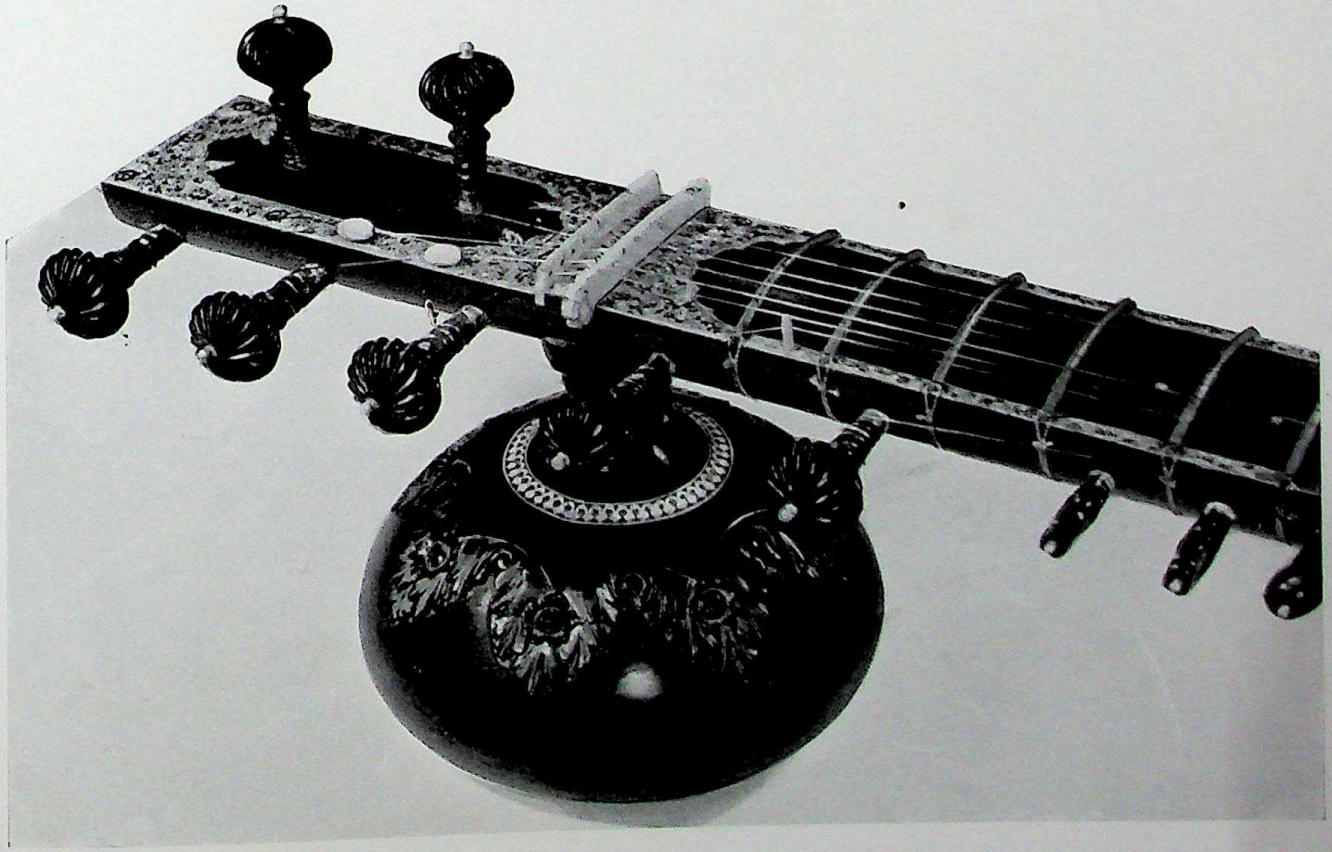

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68 *Lakshmi;* Bankura. Brass elephant upon wheels fixed with a highly ornate stand showing a female deity with an attendant. Specimen of *Dhokra* workmanship. 19th Century A.D. Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

69 Bell; Midnapore. Ritual bell made of brass. Modern. Sri Gopen Roy Collection, Calcutta.

70 Throne of an image made of brass; Murshidabad. Pedestal and back of a missing *Durga* figure showing the lion fighting with *Asura*. 18th Century A.D. Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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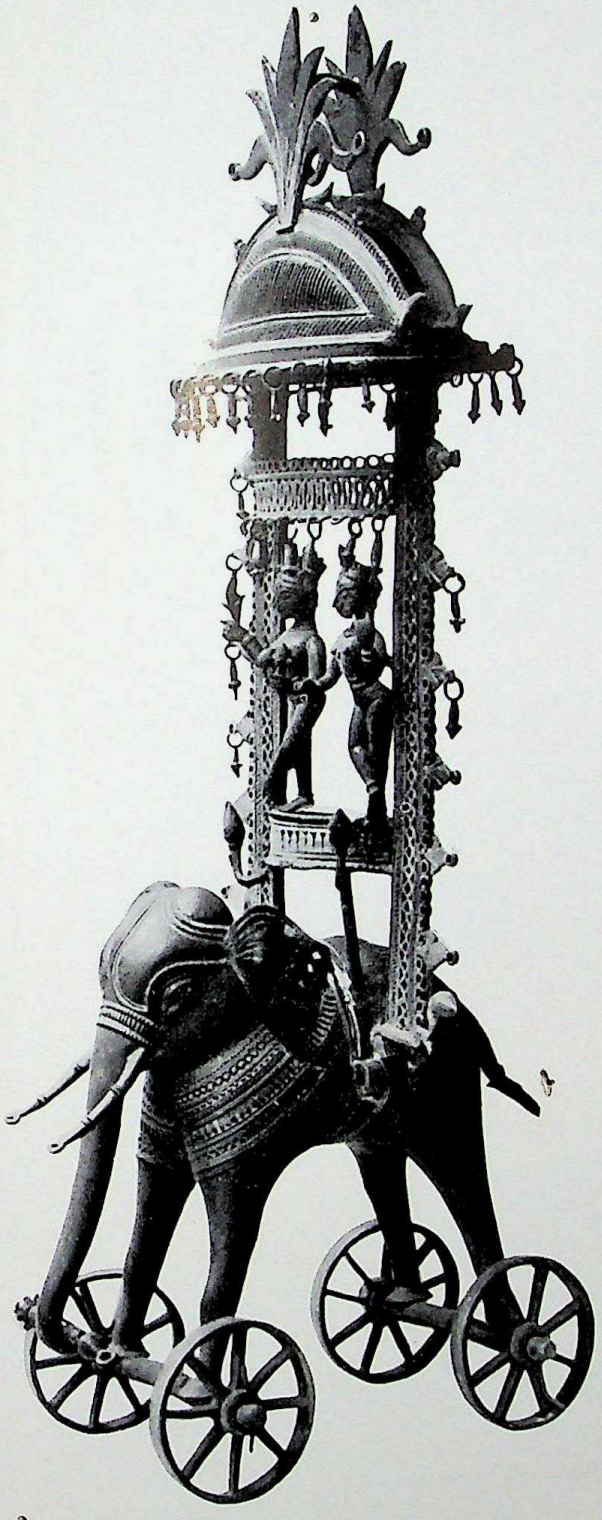

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71 *Simhasana;*
Midnapore.
Brass lion stand for *Salagrama*. The design consists of a highly stylized lion with thin accentuated limbs shown upon an elephant rendered almost linear in representation.
19th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

72 Lamp;
Midnapore.
High stand of brass with rows of lamps and a handle.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection, Calcutta.

73 Fish; Bankura.
Hollow metal, cast in ciré perdue process.
Specimen of *Dhokra* workmanship.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum, Calcutta.

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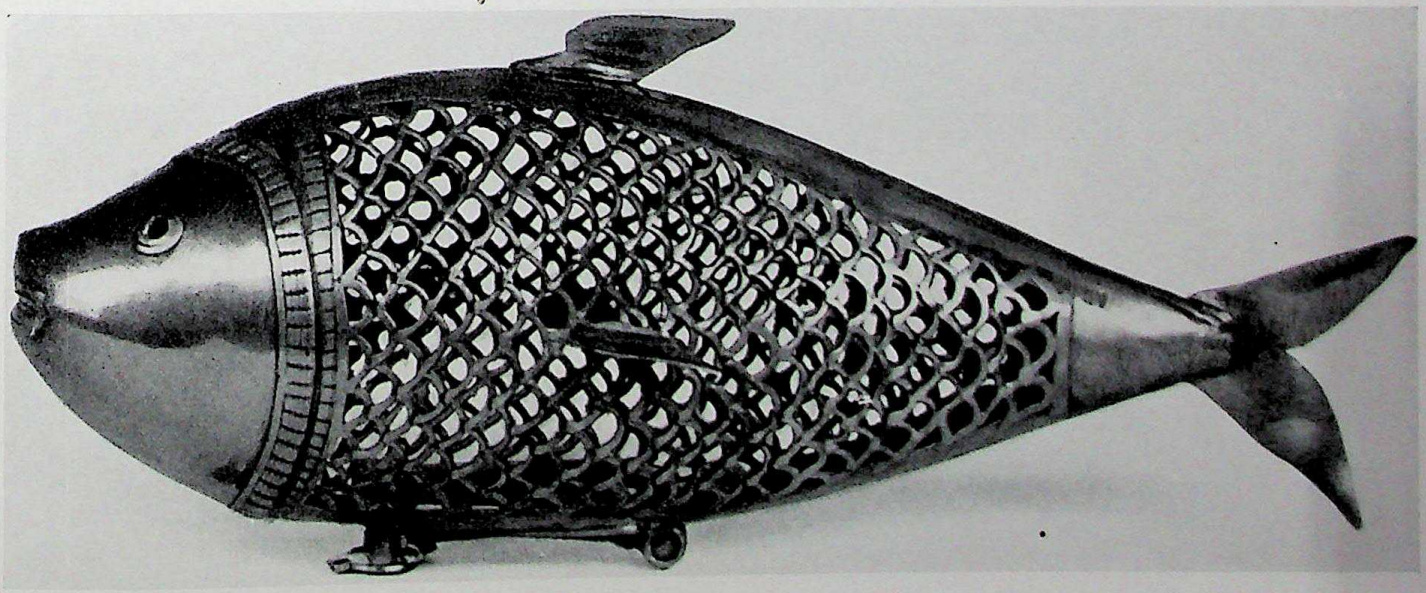

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74 Lower part of a *simhasana;* Murshidabad.
Brass lions; originally held a seat for
some deity.
18th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

75 Ritual brazier and lamp;
Midnapore.
Female figure in brass holding
an incense burner in right
hand and an oil lamp in
the other.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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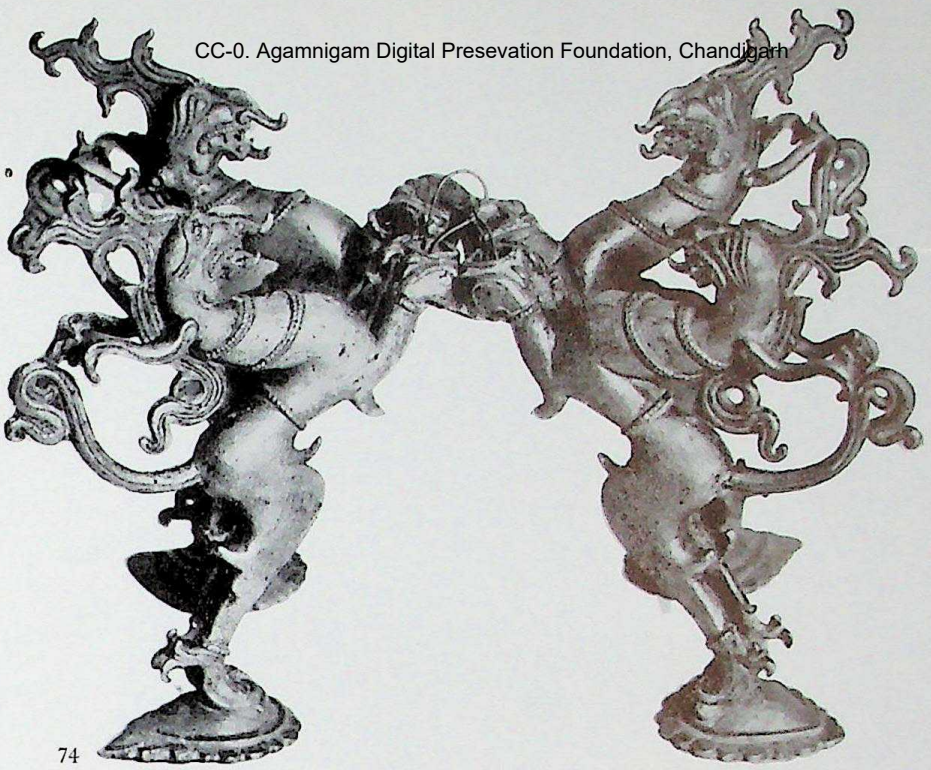

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76 Utensils; Khagra, Murshidabad.
Bell metal utensils made in Khagra
are noted for their solid casting and effective designs.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

77 *Koshakushi*; Kalighat, Calcutta.
Ritual water receptacle made in copper.
Modern.
Sri Gopen Roy Collection,
Calcutta.

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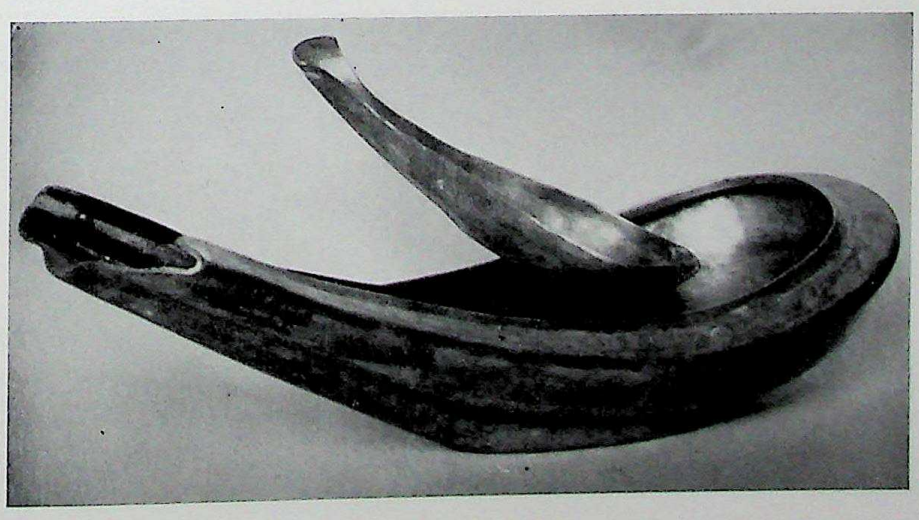

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78 *Kantha;*
Khulna, East Bengal.
Cotton quilt made of worn out cloth stitched and embroidered with designs in coloured thread.
19th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

79 *Arshilata;*
Jessore, East Bengal.
Embroidered *Kantha* used for covering looking glass.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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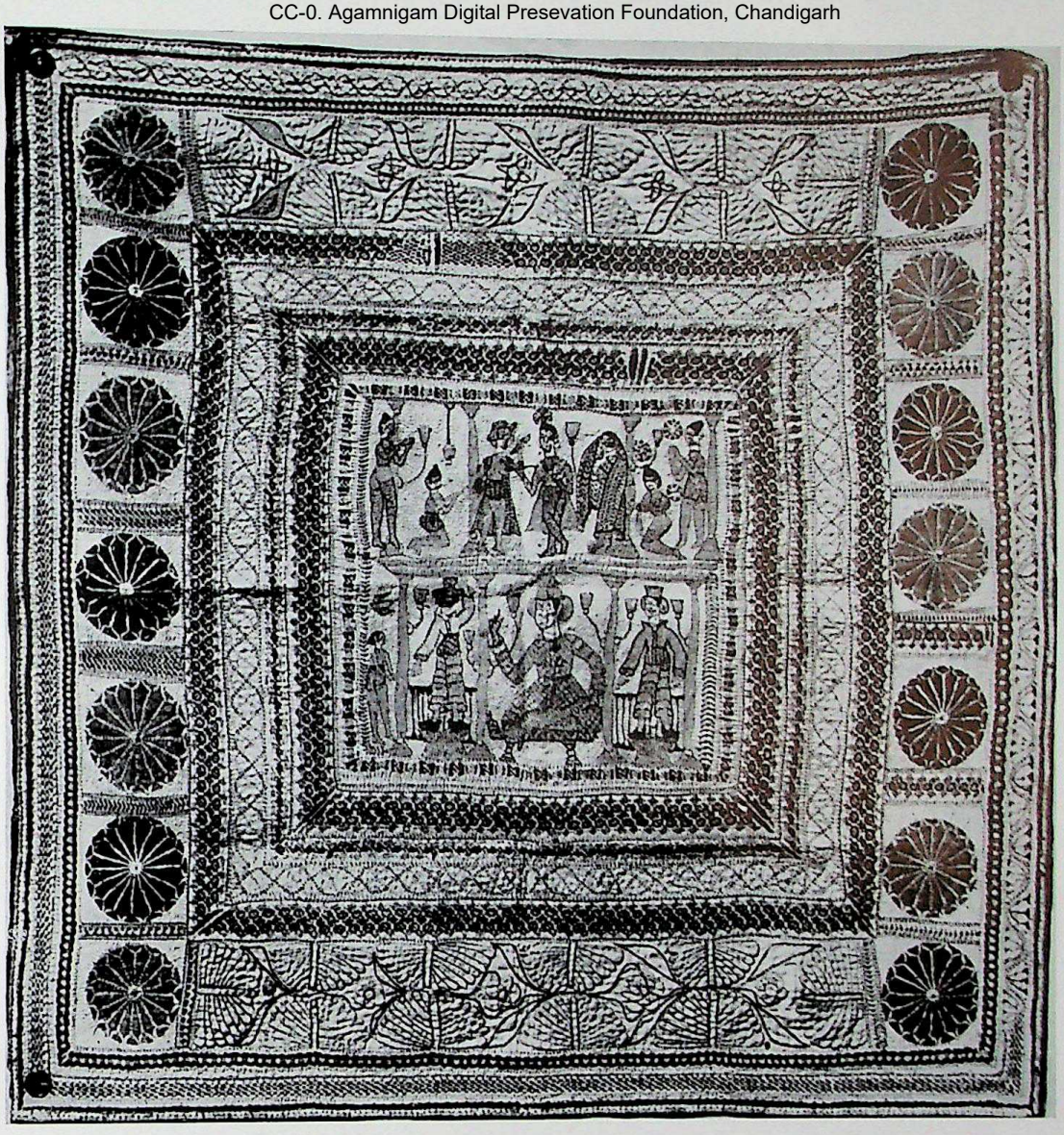

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80 *Lep Kantha;* Khulna, East Bengal.
Embroidered textile quilt used as wrap; white ground with central lotus; floral border; flower, fish, and animal designs in red, yellow, green and black colours.
Late 19th Century A.D.
Indian Museum, Calcutta.

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81 *Kantha;* Faridpur, East Bengal.

Stitched textile wrap; embroidered; white ground with central lotus, *kalka* border; *Kadamba* tree at corner and other ornaments showing animals, men and women in oddly assorted dress. This elaborately done *Kantha* reveals the rich repertory of designs evolved and nursed by the women of Bengal and handed down from generation to generation.

Late 19th Century A.D.

Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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82 *Matrikas;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Part of wooden architrave carved with figures of *Matrikas* moving in a procession. Figure riding an elephant is that of *Indrani; Vaishnavi* rides on *Garuda* and deer is the mount of the consort of *Agni*.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

83 *Sivani* riding on bull; Dacca, East Bengal.
Part of wooden architrave showing *Matrikas*. Excellent carving within rectangular frame decorated with flower and stringed ornament above and below.
Gurusaday Museum,
Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

84 *Matrikas* in procession; Dacca, East Bengal.
Part of wooden architrave showing *Kartikeyi, Brahmani* and *Nrisimhi* with attendant.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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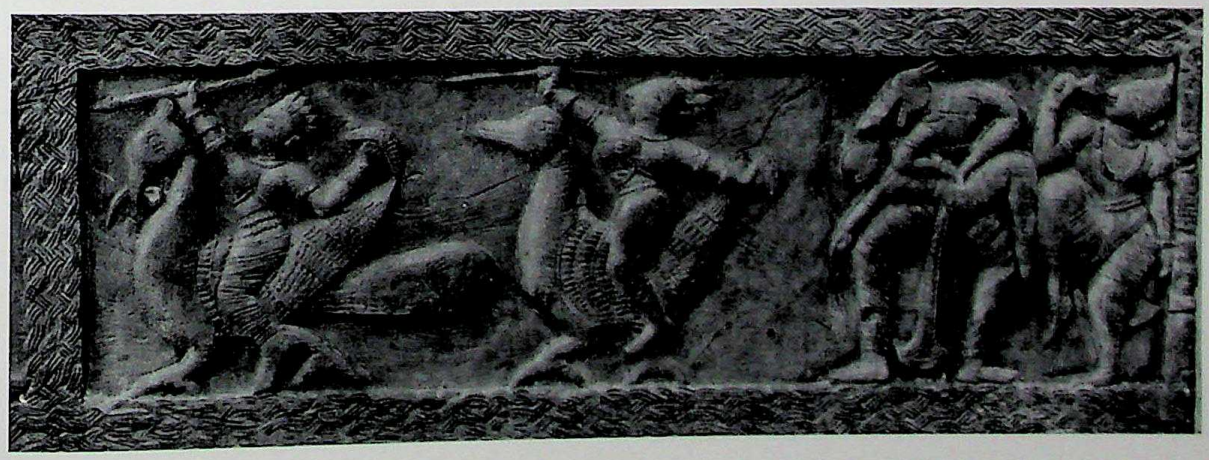

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85 Architectural ornament; Dacca, East Bengal.
Relief and fretwork in wood showing elaborate pastoral scene.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

86 *Krishna* with *Yashoda;* Dacca, East Bengal.
Part of architectural ornament showing *Krishna* and *Balarama* being dressed by *Yashoda.*
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

87 Milking; Dacca, East Bengal.
Part of wooden architectural panel showing a cow being milked while a woman to the right holds the calf and another cow standing with her calf to left.
19th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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88 Door jamb;
Rajshahi, East Bengal.
Relief work on black stone
in three compartments;
uppermost in fragment shows
kinnara figure, middle panel shows
Gajasimha and the bottom a
dvarapala under an arched
niché. Elaborate carving showing
balance and design.
11th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

89 *Vishnu Chakra;*
Sarisadaha, 24 Parganas.
Double sided
stone wheel with spokes in the shape of
lotus buds; figure of four handed
Vishnu dancing upon *Garuda* at centre.
10th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

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90 Head of a lady; Dinajpur, East Bengal.
Carved in shining black basalt the head has a melancholy grace; the facial characteristics suggest the possibility of its being a portrait.
10th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

91 *Vishnu* standing;
Jessore, East Bengal.
Executed in black stone the figure stands with an aloof majesty and a graceful and emotional countenance.
The extremely elaborate stela at the back shows the figures of *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvati* on two sides and an overgrowth of ornamental details almost verging on the side of the baroque.
The elaborate *Kirtimukha* at the top, the *kinnaras* and the *gajasimhas* just below the cornucopia of ornamental details are full of design possibilities if adopted with discrimination.
11th Century A.D.
Asutosh Museum,
Calcutta.

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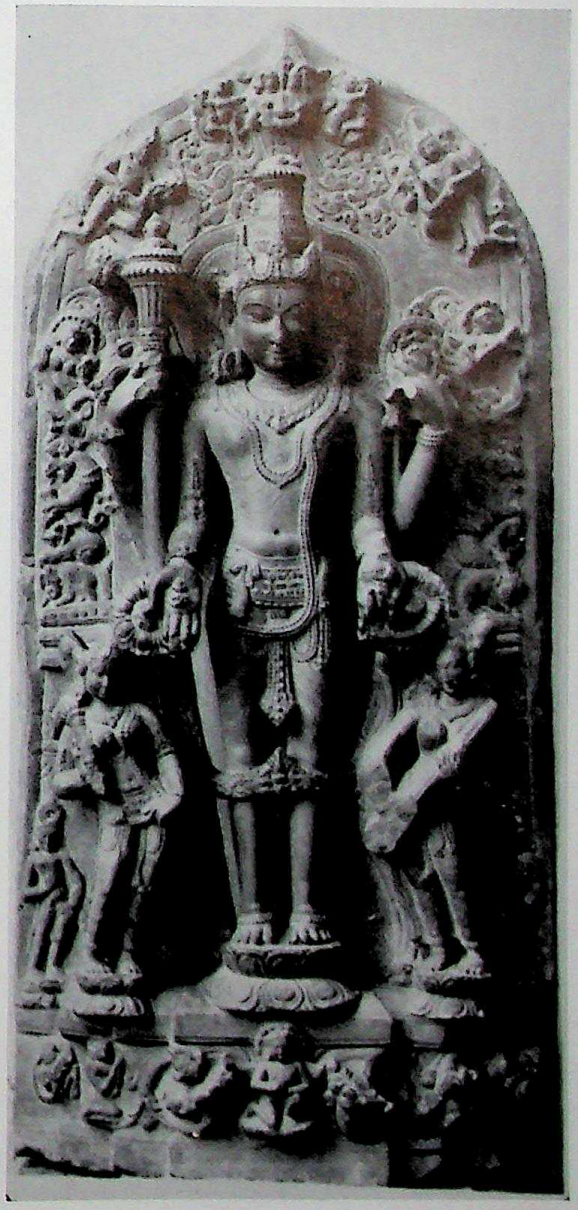

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92-93 Illustrations from *Tulsidas*; Mahisadal, Midnapore.
Painting on paper from a manuscript of the *Ramayana* of *Tulsidas* copied by one Icharam Misra for the Rani Lachhima of Mahisadal. The illustrations done in the traditional *pata* style show in two rectangular compartments the story of the birth of *Rama*.
Colours used: yellow, green, blue, red, crimson and black upon an yellowish ground.
1772 A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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92-93

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94 *Ramayana* scene; Mahisadal, Midnapore.
Painting on paper showing the mythical bird *Jatayu's* effort to prevent *Ravana* from carrying away *Sita*.
The tremendous curve in the body of the bird indicates the enormity of strength created by the bird in his mission.
Ravana in blue colour with ten heads sits on his car with *Sita* by his side. Elaborate coloured scales indicate the body of the bird and flowered quails the plume. Two flowered plants keep the balance on either side.
1772 A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

95 Descent of *Ganga*; Mahisadal, Midnapore.
Illustration from *Tulsidas* showing *Bhagirath* seated on his car blowing a conch-shell; *Ganga* shown in solid wavy shades of deep blue and white shaded with a red line that indicates its flow.
1772 A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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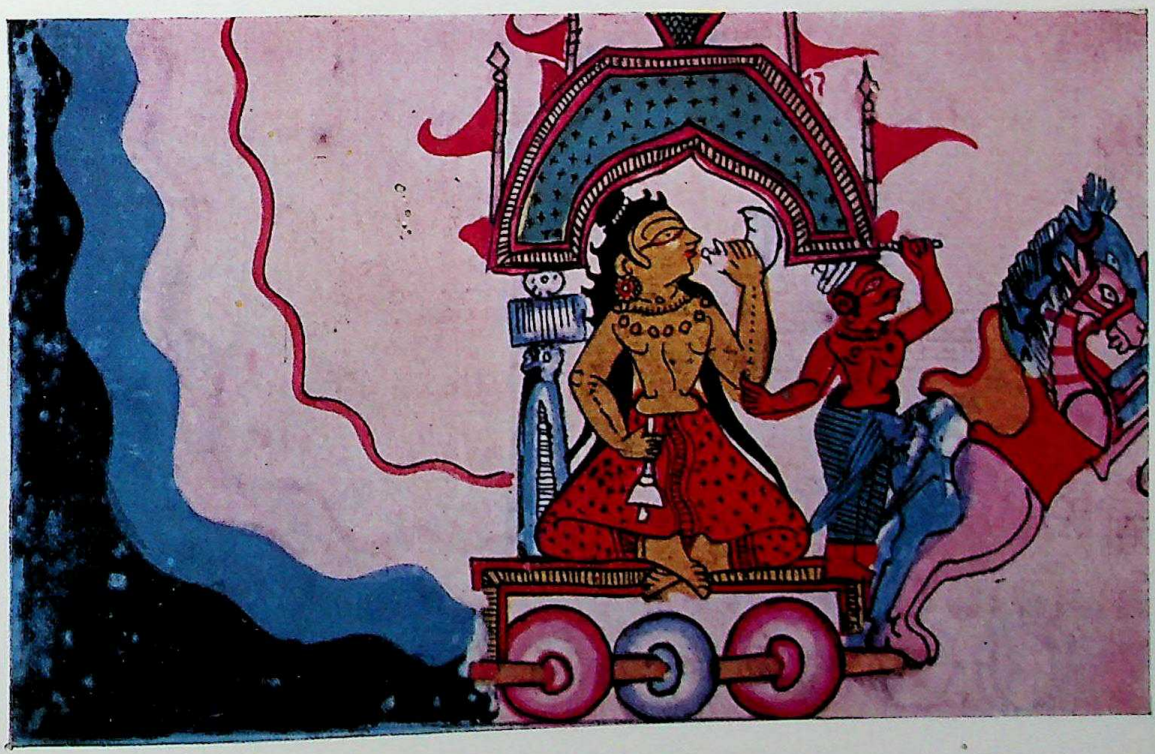

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96 Coronation of *Rama;* Mahisadal, Midnapore.
Painting on paper showing *Rama* seated on throne with *Sita*; *Lakshmana* waving a fan and *Hanuman* and *Bibhishana* standing with folded hands. Compact composition with counter-balanced curves.
1772 A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

97 Illustration from *Tulsi Ramayana;* Mahishadal, Midnapur.
Scene showing *Rama*, *Lakshmana* and *Sita* with attendants. Beautiful tree and flowering plant maintain compactness and harmony of the scene.
1772 A.D.
Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

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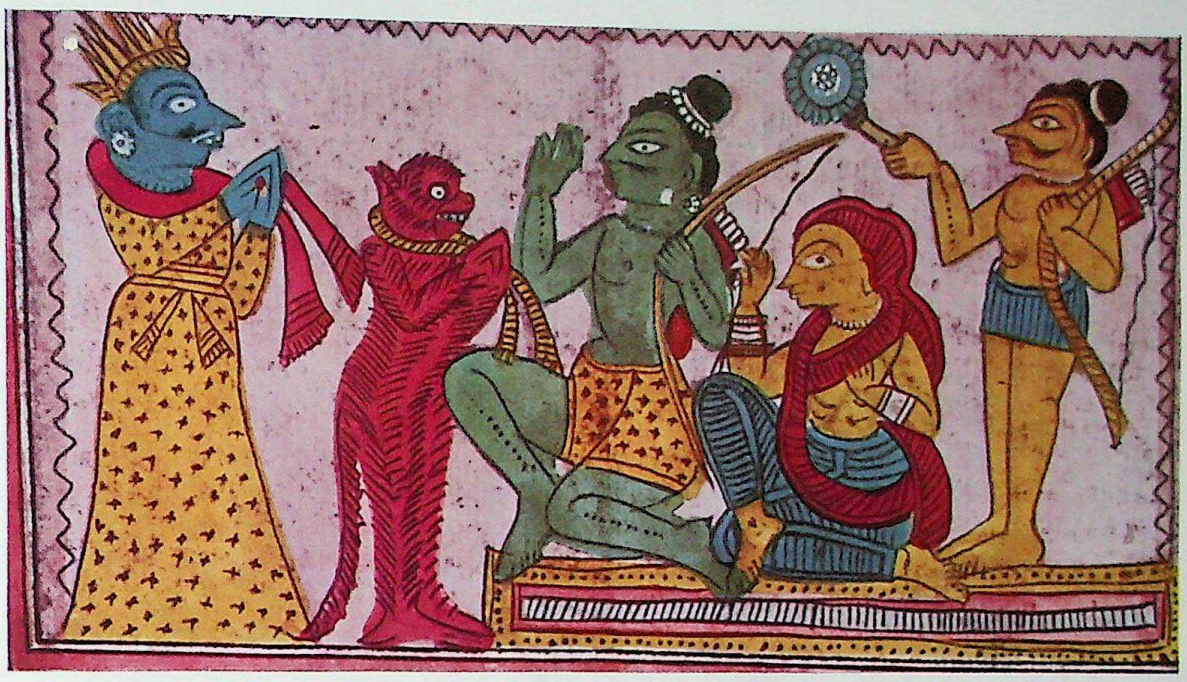

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98 Kalighat *Pat;* Kalighat, Calcutta.
Painting on paper showing image of *Kali* in black, red and white colours; *Siva* prostrate under feet.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Government Industrial and Commercial Museum, Calcutta.

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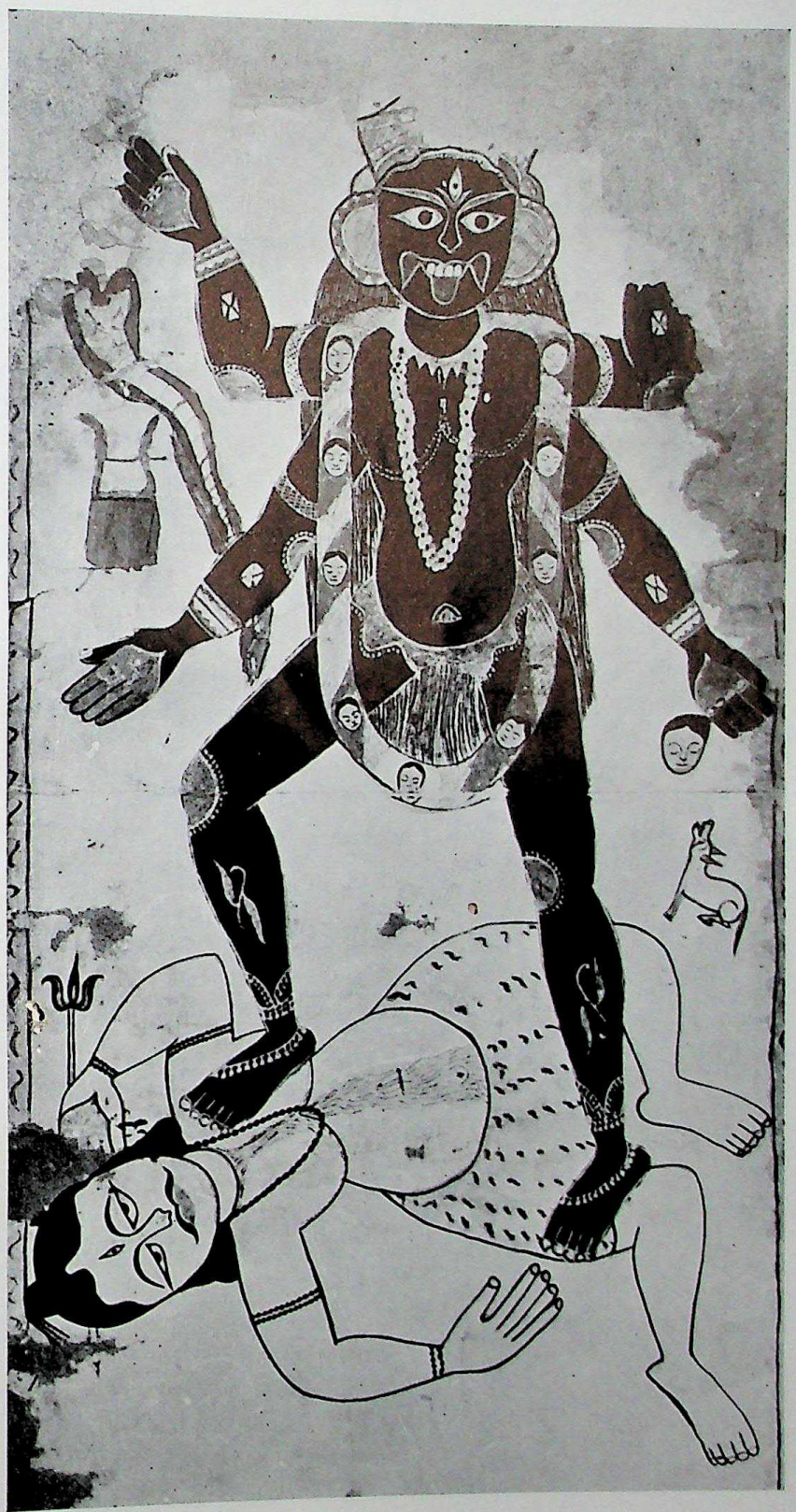

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99 *Pat* painting; Kalighat, Calcutta.
Unfinished painting on paper
showing figure of the warrior god *Kartikeya*,
wearing *nagra* shoes and *shamla* head gear.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Craft Museum,
Indian Institute of Art in Industry,
Calcutta.

100 Part of a *Pat;* Bankura.
Santhal painting done on paper; Colours used: blue,
yellow and black.
Early 20th Century A.D.
Gurusaday Museum, Thakurpukur, 24 Parganas.

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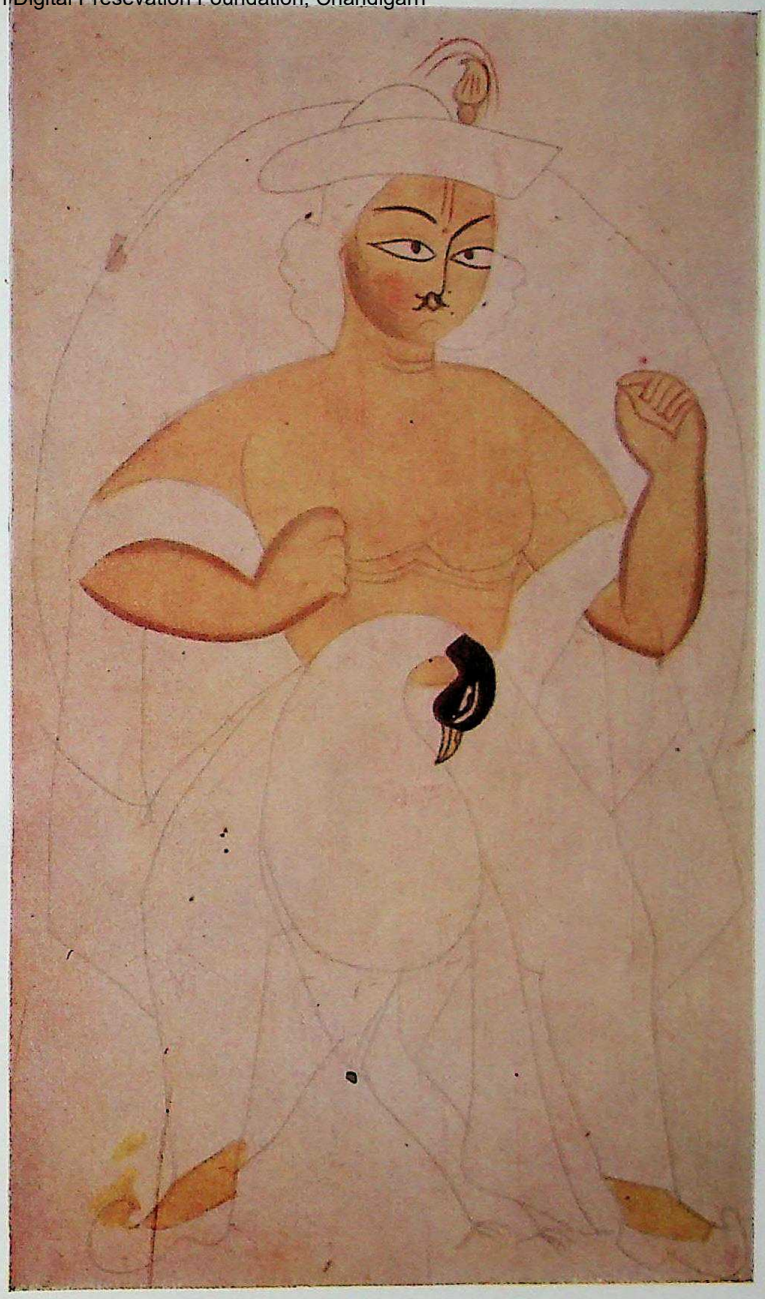

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